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Ex-Judges Establish Human Rights Tribunal Concern Over Undemocratic Laws, Violations by State

Gazette News Service

A path breaking event took place on 10th January, 1987 when the Indian Peoples Human Rights Commission was inaugurated at New Delhi's Press Club. Five of the Commission's founding members were present on the occasion: Prof. A.R. Desai, Prof. Romila Thapar, Mr. V.M. Tarkunde and Mr Bhagwan Dass.

The other members of the Commission are Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer, Mr. Shyam Benegal, Mr. Om Puri, Mr Samar Sen and Mahasweta Devi.



The first act of the Commission has been to set up the Indian People's Human Rights Tribunal, consisting of former judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts. The Commission will receive petitions and complaints concerning violation of human rights by the State, conduct preliminary investigation and then forward them to the Tribunal.

The Tribunal, a high powered non-government body, will include:

V.R. Krishna Iyer, former judge of the Supreme Court (Chairman of the Tribunal), P.S. Poti, former Chief Justice, Gujarat High Court, T.U. Mehta, former Chief Justice, Himachal Pradesh High Court, B.J. Dewan, former Chief Justice, Andhra Pradesh High Court, Sharma Sarkar, former judge of Calcutta High Court, Harihar Mohapatra, former judge of Orissa High Court, Jyotirmoy Nag, former judge of Calcutta High Court, D.P. Desai, former judge of Gujarat High Court, and C.J.R. Paul, former judge of Madras High Court.

The first issue that the Tribunal will take up will be the legality of the police firing at Arwal in Bihar on the 19th of April, 1986. A large number of landless and poor peasants were killed in the firing but the Bihar State Government

has so far not ordered a judicial enquiry into the incident. Sri P.S. Poti, Sri T.U. Mehta and Sri Sharma Sarkar will inquire into this incident. The dates of the sittings will be announced in due course.

Expanse of Government Lawlessness

In his inaugural remarks, Prof. A.R. Desai explained that the commission had been formed in response to the "growing expanse of government lawlessness". Mr. V.M. Tarkunde pointed out that when human rights were violated by the State itself, there was no body or investigating agency to go into such violations. "As people begin to understand and demand their rights, State terrorism was bound to grow", warned the former judge of the Bombay High Court.

Prof. Romila Thapar of Jawaharlal Nehru University said that in a democracy it was essential to have watchdog institutions just as it was important to build up a moral authority in the larger public interest.

Also see story on page 14.

Cease Fire, Hold Talks, Restore Politics Khalistan Not The Issue Unique Delhi Dialogue on Punjab

Gazette News Service

While the government in Delhi continues to gape vacantly at Punjab, and the Punjab government itself persists with playing a supplicatory role vis-a-vis the centre, a group of citizens in Delhi went ahead with organising a breakthrough round table dialogue on the crisis in the troubled state.

The round table meeting held on Thursday January 15 at the India International Centre was spearheaded by Dr. I.K. Gujral of the Punjab Group.

The meeting (a full report of which is carried on page 8-9) was one of the most unique to be held since the Punjab crisis went into flames with the army assault on the Golden Temple in June 1984. Its uniqueness lay in the fact that it was able to get

individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of viewpoints to sit around the same table for



Inder Gujral: Spearheading a breakthrough dialogue.

a full day to exchange views without being uncontrollably intolerant of one another's point of view.

Wide Range

A wide range of opinion from the Congress-I to the Damadami Taksal was represented at the round table, which included members of the CPI, CPM, Janata, BJP, the United Akali Dal, both factions of the Akali Dal, retired senior civil servants, retired police and military officers, serving editors of major newspapers, academics and members of leading civil liberties organisations.

Unanimous Call

The meeting gave a unanimous call for a cease fire or moratorium to the government

and all groups involved in violent incidents in Punjab. It also called for a restoration of the stalled political dialogue in the Punjab during the proposed 3 month moratorium from Republic Day onwards.

All the participants at the meeting agreed that it was not only possible, but also desirable, for political talks to be initiated with all parties and groups concerned with the crisis, barring those based across the international border.

As regards the question of secession, the overwhelming opinion around the table was that to a large extent the 'demand' for Khalistan was more cry of anger and alienation than a general desire for political separation from the rest of the country.

The Call of the Republic

AN ANALYSIS OF HOW THE PRESS HAS IGNORED THE FACTS, MISUNDERSTOOD THE PROBLEM AND FOCUSED ON THE WRONG ISSUE, CONCERNING THE SO-CALLED 'BOYCOTT' OF REPUBLIC DAY

Preminder Singh

The public generally remained cool. Nobody would have noticed the absence of a few thousand muslims at the Republic Day Parade and since the President hadn't bothered to call us to his party there was no way we could 'not participate' in the festivities. But the Press was seriously afflicted by hysteria and jingoistic fervour — especially editors, columnists and political commentators. So were muslim intellectuals and politicians.

Their collective wisdom can be briefly simplified, summarised and 'unpompified' as follows.

- Our Republic has been insulted — what do you expect from the Muslims anyway?
- Muslims better behave or some Hindus may get angry and retaliate.
- Shahabuddin is communal, anti-national and ambitious. 'Send him packing'.
- Why doesn't the Janata Party do something? Chandra Shekhar is too tolerant of his protege. He better watch it himself if the Janata Party is to win elections.
- Let's not cry over spilt milk. We all know that no government can win an election on Muslim votes.

Republic Insulted

"Muslims have every right to protest ... but those who would convert this right into a challenge to a revered national symbol are indulging in mischief ... please ignore this call. Protest a day before if you will; protest a day later if you must. Protest against the government, if you want. But do not protest against the nation ... this is not only extremely dangerous but positively antinational ... has everyone lost all sense of balance all respect for the country ... Islam does not teach treachery to the nation.... The

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The first 3 weeks of this year witnessed an outbreak of patriotism not seen in India since the Chinese war in 1962. The cause of this virulent outbreak was a call given by the All India Babri Masjid Conference from New Delhi to the Muslims "not to participate in or associate themselves with the observance of the Republic Day on 26th January, 1987, except those individuals who are on official duty" (Declaration of 22nd December). Convened by Janata Party Member of Parliament Syed Shahabuddin the conference expressed its "deep sense of anguish and regret at the continued occupation of the historic Babri Masjid, Ayodhya, since 23rd December 1949 and the regular performance of Puja and Darshan in the Masjid itself since 1st February '86".

Indian Union Muslim League is indulging in subterfuge ... the dispute it now says must be resolved by August 15. In other words another national day has been converted into a deadline. The first challenge was both to the constitution and the Republic, next time will these gentlemen reject our freedom itself? ... it is time for all of us to stand up and make it very clear that no one has a right to threaten the ideological basis of the Modern Indian State ... we would appeal to the muslims to fly the flag proudly on Republic Day (Telegraph (TEL) 25 & 31 Dec '86, 6 & 11 Jan '87).

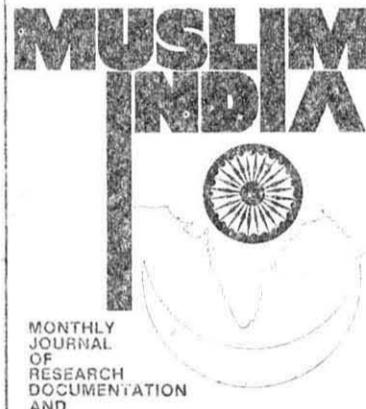
Muslims Better Behave

"The refusal of even some muslims to participate in an occasion which celebrates the country's unity will only lend credibility to those who accuse them of not being a part of the national mainstream ... for if a section of muslims believes that its religious identity is in peril, a section of Hindus increasingly feels that it has been taken for granted and is uniting in militant organisations ... what the peddlars of dangerous sectarianism are after is a dubious political objective. (THEY ARE ONLY NOMINALLY LOYAL TO THIS COUNTRY" (italics mine) (Indian Express (IE) 3, 10 & 14 JAN).

The muslim leaders ... are either guilty of utter indifference to national sentiments or are wilfully engaging in dangerous brinkmanship ... (this) entirely gratuitous boycott call can give a fillip to the anti-muslim sentiment among certain elements ... "nothing is gained by

persisting with the call. It could provide the anti-muslim elements among the Hindus one more argument in support of their attitude" (Times of India) (TOI 3, 10 & 14 JAN).

"It is for the Muslims to firmly reject these cynical efforts arousing communal passions for in the final analysis, they can only provide further ammunition to Hindu communalists"



(Statesman 7 Jan).

Shahabuddin Is A Traitor; Send Him Packing

He is "The worst culprit in this sordid affair ... the author and chief protagonist of the boycott plan. Mr. Shahabuddin's conduct should dispel all illusions about his being vaguely secular or only mildly communal. The kind of politicians he has associated himself with and the very language he has used ... make it plain that Mr. Shahabuddin prefers the company of communalists such as Mr. Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait to secular politics or an effort to redress whatever he could from a secu-

lar platform, including a seat in the Lok Sabha, and has no further use for the Janata Party" (Statesman 7 Jan.).

"It is a little intriguing that the Janata Party leadership seems always to develop cold feet in acting against an erring Mr. Shahabuddin, although his emergence as a muslim communal leader has often compromised his party's larger interests" ... Can it be that in order to strengthen his personal hold on the muslim masses, he is willing to jeopardise their position in Indian Society? The nation can do without such self appointed crusaders. (HT 5 & 13 Jan.).

"Many Janata leaders had been sharply critical of the late Indira Gandhi for not taking timely action against Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and thereby allowing the Punjab situation to get out of hand. What do they have to say about Syed Shahabuddin?" (IE Jan 14).

Surely the Editor of the Indian Express couldn't already have forgotten that it was the same Mrs. Gandhi who built up the 'Sant' and tried to use him to destabilise the Akali dominated Ministry in Punjab in the eighties. And while Bhindranwale was imposing a justice of his own, Shahabuddin is merely asking for it... "Sincerely and in a spirit of fraternal co-existence and mutual goodwill appeals to the Hindu community not to be misled by the propaganda of the chauvinist elements, try to appreciate the agony and measure the bitterness generated by forcible occupation of a historic place of worship, and in the interests of the nation persuade, even pressurise the intransigent elements to restore the Babri Masjid to the Muslim community" (22 Dec. Declaration).

Janata Party Do Something

"The Janata party is in a quandry. Although the organisation lives permanently in a state of crisis, and to that extent this is just one more manifestation of its political incoherence (it) is left with no other alternative except to expel its former general secretary and one time protege of Mr. Chandra Shekhar. Mr. Shahabuddin has evidently decided that he has extracted whatever he could from a secu-

lar platform, including a seat in the Lok Sabha, and has no further use for the Janata Party" (Statesman 7 Jan.).

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No Crying Over Split Milk

But "One thing that is obvious is that the status quo ante cannot be restored. The small platform has become a major centre of Hindu pilgrimage as would be evident from the number of people who were crushed to death (50) in the melee on Nov. 9, 1986. Like cow slaughter this issue has come to arouse the deepest emotions amongst the Hindus. A continuing agitation by the muslims can only strengthen these emotions." (TOI 10 Jan.).

"The Babri Masjid Committee is coming into conflict with the most deeply held religious sentiments of the Hindus. No government that must face an election is likely to take a stand that will alienate large numbers of Hindus to secure the votes of the muslims."

What Was Left Out

Even more important than what was said was what was left out. With the single exception of Nikhil Chakravarty (TOI

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Matter of Facts

1. Ram Janam Bhoomi is a Chabutra (platform) 17' x 21'.
2. About a hundred paces away is the Masjid built by Babar's Governor Mir Baqui in 1528.
3. No historical reference exists about either the precise spot of Ramchandraji's birth or the existence of any temple on this site.
4. In 1885 the Mahant of the Chabutra was refused permission by the local authorities to construct a temple on the Chabutra. His appeals to Sub Judge, (Faizabad) Hari Kishan as well as to the district court were dismissed.
5. A railing was constructed separating the Chabutra from the masjid to prevent communal trouble.
6. In 1949 a violent anti muslim mob occupied the masjid and installed statues of Sri Ram Chandra. A stay was granted but the statues remained inside and a lock was put on the masjid preventing muslim worship that had been going on for over 400 years.
7. On Jan 25, 1986 a Hindu advocate of Faizabad filed an appeal asking for permission for the Hindus to worship — not on the Chabutra but in the masjid.
8. One week later on Feb 1

Brahmpura: CRPF Harassed Non-Sikhs Also

**REPORT OF THE ENQUIRY COMMITTEE APPOINTED BY THE
INDIAN MINORITIES & DALIT FRONT**

Despite an attempt by the C.R.P. Force to terrorise the residents of village Brahmpura, at mid-night of December 27, 1986, the villagers looked defiant and charged with emotion when they took part in a massive gathering at Brahmpura, on January 7. It will be recalled that the para-military men went on the rampage in a delayed action response to nab a proclaimed terrorist. The incident itself, widely reported in the press led to a demand for the withdrawal of the CRPF from Punjab.

"**M**y father was beaten mercilessly. The humiliation was unbearable for the old man and he died a day after the incident" said Mr. Jagjit Singh, an educated farmer of the village. Mr. Jagjit Singh about 40, is a heart patient whereas his father Mr. Gurdit Singh Shah at the age of 65 was hale and hearty.

Mr. Gurcharan Singh's house which is on the outskirts of the village was the first to be raided by the furious C.R.P.F. men. After breaking open his door, they shot dead the dog which barked at them. The raiding party dragged Gurcharan Singh out of his bed and asked him the whereabouts of Brahma Singh (Avtar Singh Brahma), the man they were after. They started beating Gurcharan Singh right and left with rifle butts when he told them that he knew not who Brahma Singh was. Joginder Singh, Gurcharan's son, was also taken to task when he tried to save his father. Mrs. Gurcharan Singh was also manhandled when she cried for help. The Enquiry Committee could see the signs of beating on the body of Mr. Gurcharan Singh even on January 7.

"**T**hey beat us with rifle butts and about twenty persons were made to sit in the 'verandah' in the chilly night without any warm clothing. All were dragged out of their beds at 11 in the night and were not allowed to wear proper clothes" said Mr. Buta Singh.

Mr. Buta Singh's uncle is an inspector in the 66th Battalion of C.R.P.F. He showed his uncle's photograph in uniform but to no avail. The C.R.P.F. men told Buta Singh that his uncle Ajit Singh may be an Inspector but they were sure that all Sikhs were terrorists. While corroborating the version given by Mr. Buta Singh, Mr. Gulbagh Singh told his woeful tale to the enquiry committee. Mr. Gulbagh Singh, himself a constable in the C.R.P.F. had come on leave and showed his identity card to the C.R.P.F. men conducting the search in the village but it didn't serve any purpose. "They threw down my identity card and started beating me with rifle butts. They also charged me with training the villagers in the use of arms and helping the terrorists", said Mr. Gulbagh Singh.

Mr. Sudarshan Singh, a warden in the Central Jail, Amritsar, another resident of Brahmpura, was also beaten in his house and his identity card torn to pieces. Mr. Sudarshan Singh described how his brother-in-law, Mr. Gurmit Singh, a lance naik in the army, who had come to visit him was

down and trampled over it. "They shouted at us" said Buta Singh, "Jaan chahiye to Brahma Singh (Avtar Singh Brahma) ko pesh karo." (If you want to save your life, then produce Avtar Singh Brahma).

Suhagwanti, an old woman, wife of the village shopkeeper Mr. Mukand Lal a Hindu was also maltreated by the C.R.P.F. men. Her husband became unconscious when the gate of their house was broken. Suhagwanti is a bitter woman today and complains against the brutal behaviour of the C.R.P.F. She told the enquiry committee that their family had been living in the village since ages and had never been threatened by the Sikhs. They had full faith in the Sikhs of the village.

down and trampled over it. "They shouted at us" said Buta Singh, "Jaan chahiye to Brahma Singh (Avtar Singh Brahma) ko pesh karo." (If you want to save your life, then produce Avtar Singh Brahma).

Mr. Jawahar Lal, another Hindu resident of the village was with the Sarpanch of the village when he heard Avtar Singh Brahma on the loud-speaker it was about 9.30 p.m. S. Daljit Singh, sarpanch of the village advised Jawaharlal to sleep in his house that night. At about 10.30 or 10.45 the doors were broken open and armed C.R.P.F. men started beating everyone in the house. Mr. Jawaharlal disclosed his identity and pleaded with the C.R.P.F. men not to beat the Sarpanch, an old noble soul. But not only was he (Jawaharlal) beaten with rifle butts, he was also dubbed a traitor for trying to defend "those who killed Hindus. Mr. Jawaharlal explained that there was no communal tension in

used foul words against Guru Granth Sahib but also fired at the Holy Book. The Sarpanch then lost his temper and asked them to kill him instead of insulting his Guru in his presence. An angry CRP man fired but missed him.

S. Daljit Singh told the Enquiry Committee in the presence of many other villagers that five women were raped that night by the C.R.P.F. men and many young girls were molested. The story of rape and molestation was also confirmed by a few ladies who didn't wish to be identified in the press.

Avtar Singh Brahma accompanied by his two associates came to the house of Gurdial Singh, at about 9.15 p.m. on Dec. 27 and asked him and his brother Bhag Singh to instal the



1. Prof. Darshan Singh Ragi, the Akal Takht Jathedar, addressing the gathering at Brahmpura 2. Daljit Singh — Sarpanch of Brahmpura 3. Father of Avtar Singh Brahma who provoked the CRP at Brahmpura 4. A view of the protest gathering at Brahmpura

sleeping in his room. But the C.R.P.F. men not only gave him a severe beating but also shouted at him that he had no business to be in the village. Mr. Gurmit Singh, swearing by his Guru, pleaded that he had come to enquire about the welfare of his sister Mrs. Sudarshan Singh. The C.R.P.F. men abused the Sikh Gurus for having created a problem for the country. They said all Sikh Gurus were also terrorists. One of them picked from the mantle piece a photograph of Guru Gobind Singh and threw it

When questioned how Brahma provoked the C.R.P.F. men, on the village loud speaker and brought havoc to the village, she said, that the boy didn't say anything unpleasant; rather he asked the CRPF men not to harass the villagers because of him. Jagjit Singh said that Avtar Singh Brahma kept on repeating his own name on the loud-speaker for about 15 minutes, challenging the CRPF men to arrest him. He also advised all the villagers not to open their doors as at any moment there could be an

the village and all the three Hindu families of the village felt very safe. He blamed the C.R.P.F. for creating communal tension and misbehaving with the village people. Mr. Daljit Singh, the Sarpanch, was made to accompany the C.R.P.F. men to the gurdwara as the security personnel thought the announcements had been made from there. The C.R.P.F. people, using abusive language, searched the gurdwara with their shoes on. When the Sarpanch protested against the sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib, they not only

loud-speaker. They obeyed his command and Brahma then addressed the villagers on the micro-phone. He advised the Hindu shop-keepers not to sell cigarettes and bidis in future. He warned the C.R.P.F. stationed in the Girls School in the village to desist from harassing people on the pretext of arresting him. He also warned the police that if atrocities on the villagers were not stopped, they would be taught a lesson. He intimidated the soldiers by

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Computers and Human Rights

A.G. Noorani



Computers: Technology to spread Information or curtail freedom?

India is mindlessly racing into the computer age with little public awareness of even the concept of 'computer crimes'. In the US computers have created a veritable national data bank containing substantial personal information about most Americans. The Office of Technology Assessment prepared for the US Congress a 152-page report recommending legislation to protect the citizen's privacy and for resolution of conflicts that were bound to increase as government agencies turned to computerised record surveillance. The report was prepared at the request of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee and the House Judiciary Committee.

More than a decade ago Congress rejected the idea of a National Data Centre containing computer records in one place. But what has come into being is what *Los Angeles Times* called a "de facto national data base" created from "hundreds of separate computerised record systems that can be reached over telephone lines by computers virtually anywhere in the country".

Computerised files that are open to electronic inspection by government agencies "range

from federal tax records to social security files, from state drivers' licence records to private bank account statements".

It is possible for the US government, by searching out information through a variety of these computerised data banks, to prepare electronic dossiers on millions of citizens. In welfare and law enforcement programmes computerised information is widely used.

It is difficult for a citizen to know (a) whether and what files concerning him exist and where, (b) whether the information in the computerised files is accurate, and (c) whether the information acquired and stored by one agency is being used by another for a different purpose.

In 1974 the US Congress enacted the Privacy Act which provides some safeguards. But a lot has happened since to render them inadequate. The American Civil Liberties Union set up a Privacy and Technology Project. Its Director, Jerry Berman, has pointed out the dangers underlying the present system as exposed in the Congressional Report: "If Congress tried to introduce a Bill to establish a central file on every citizen, it would go down to defeat, but this report shows

that what couldn't be done frontally has happened incrementally".

How many Indians are aware of this creeping danger? Few indeed.

In 1976 a Committee of Experts was set up by the Department of Electronics under the chairmanship of Maj-Gen (retd) A Balasubramanian. It recommended guidelines for "physical security in a computer environment". On August 12, a national symposium on "Security of Computerised Information" at Madras recommended to the government of India that it should "reconsider" these guidelines in view of the changed circumstances and bring forward legislation to protect data privacy. It also recommended that a committee be established to study the whole gamut of computer crimes and suggest appropriate remedial measures against them.

A booklet published by the UN entitled "Human Rights and Scientific and Technological Developments" contains a summary of the main points of the studies prepared by the UN secretary-general on some aspects of the problem. One of them is the "uses of electronics which may affect the rights of the person

and the limits which should be placed on such uses in a democratic society."

The UN study recommends protective legislation embodying proper safeguards. The bare minimum is that, first, "only the personal information strictly necessary for the purposes of the respective system should be collected". Secondly, "the individual should be notified that information is being gathered about him and his agreement should be obtained before the information is stored". The exception is information gathered and compiled by agencies concerned with national security and law and order and other such bodies as may be specified by law, "subject to appropriate safeguards for human rights".

On September 3, 1985, Subhas Kirpekar of *The Times of India* reported that our PM "is taking keen interest in setting up a computerised data bank for nearly 600 Congress MPs in both Houses of Parliament. Two of the five computers have already arrived. A lengthy proforma to be filled in by party MPs has been already circulated". Gandhi asked members to submit the forms by the end of September.

Subhas Kirpekar's report quoted extracts from a backgrounder circulated with the questionnaire and set out the details of the nature of the information sought. On September 4, *The Times of India* sharply attacked the move in an editorial entitled "Computer Watch". It remarked "The computer is going to be the Big Brother in the coming years. And like the infamous Big Brother in Stalinist Russia it will be fed by those who hate those over whom they are keeping a vigil".

On September 9 Kirpekar reported, once again, that the Congress-II MLAs and MLCs will also be asked to come under "computer watch".

But the PM had underestimated the resourcefulness of the animal who becomes a Congress-II legislator. The very instinct for self-preservation which makes him servile also impels him to evade a fiat which might one day lead to his undoing.

On February 9, *Indian Express* carried a report by P Raman which said that the PM's plans had gone awry "thanks to the non-cooperation from his followers". Thus "without the full lists, the computer technicians could not start the process of programming so far".

It only remains to add that on March 16, *Indian Express Magazine* carried an article by P Raman listing the sordid deeds of Congress-II men.

"Computer error has been compounded by the new leaders' ineffectiveness in dealing with such incidents, if some prominent examples are anything to go by", he remarked.

Information is not knowledge and cleverness is miles apart from judgement. In this whole affair the human rights aspect was completely, but characteristically, overlooked.

The Call of The Republic

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11 Jan) not one journalist mentioned the background to the case. The Telegraph 25 Dec. says "we accept that the muslims have a case on the Babri Masjid issue and an extremely good one". The H.T. (13 Jan) Concedes "In our view the Babri Masjid action committee does have a legitimate case when it claims that the decision to reopen for worship the adjoining piece of land (claimed to be Shri Rama's birthplace) ... while keeping the mosque itself closed is discriminatory" (HT doesn't know that the mosque has been made into a temple).

But Sunday (25 to 31 Jan) does a cover story without once mentioning that the Chabutra is an area distinct from the mosque. In fact the opposite. "By an order of the district judge, the gates of the Ram Janam Bhoomi or Babri Masjid were thrown open for Hindus to offer worship to Rama's portrait placed in the mosque's inner sanctum". Or that the muslims have worshipped in that mosque for over 400 years and that the communalism that exists has been provoked by the Hindus condoned by the Government of UP, with the Central Govt. as an apathetic collaborator.

Not only 'Sunday' but the entire National Press has failed both its readers and the country in not exposing the true dimension of the problem.



Prem Bhatia (Tribune 10 Jan) sums up the confusion — both his and that of the press. "The controversy over the Babri Masjid arose over a dispute about ownership between two religious communities involving deep sentiments which had no relevance to a national festival".

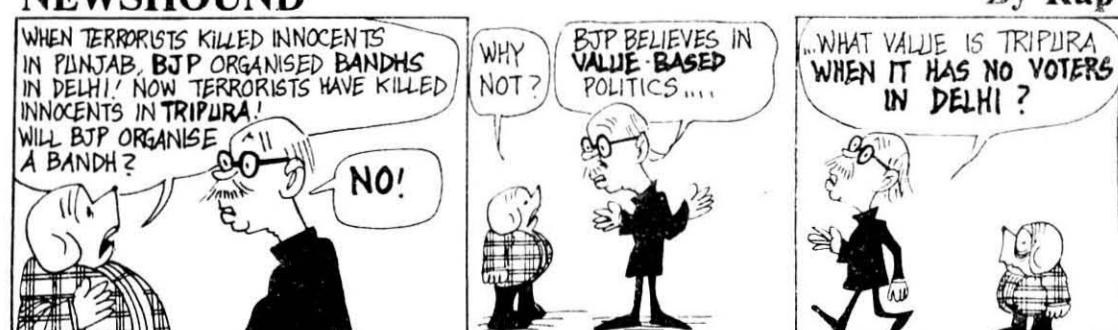
That is not true. The dispute arose because a district court passed an arbitrary, unjust and partisan order. The State Government condoned the illegality, the Central Government pretends to be a helpless spectator, and the press hounds the wrong communalists. No it is not a dispute between two religious communities. It is a dispute about justice. About truth. About fair play, whether major or minor. About the abuse of the law and the violation of the constitution in order to win elections and stay in power.

"Muslim India shall survive the loss of the Babri Masjid" said Syed Shahabuddin (Muslim India March '86).

"But — Shall the India of Gandhi and Nehru survive?
Shall the democratic survive?
Shall the rule of law survive?"

Men in power. History shall not forgive you for your short sightedness for your silence, for your apathy, for your insensitivity."

NEWSHOUND



The imposing structure that serves as the focal point of milling crowds radiating in different directions is the police *thana* of Paharganj. Let me begin my story here since otherwise all stories end here.

A few yards away from the *thana* lives a family. But if a family doesn't have a name of its own, it will be like Paharganj without a *thana*. So let's name them. Call them Sandhu's family. Sardar Gurusharan Singh Sandhu's family. He came to settle here in the forties. No, not during the partition. But seven years before it. And not from Punjab either but from Dalton-gunj Bihar. As New Delhi station developed, the lane became a busy thoroughfare. All kinds of things are served to all kinds of visitors here. Lodges (cheap sir cheap, just *das rupayya* for one night), *dhabhas* where dressed chickens are hung like criminals in medieval times, sightseeing buses with opaque glass panes, charas, ganja, liquor and, of course women. In this flourishing business flourished our Sandhu.

But let us be fair to him. He was never involved in liquor, drugs and women. He respects both his religion, and the law of the land. A pious man engaged in religious activities, it is rumoured that he even became a consensus candidate for the Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee in the fifties. In course of

time, as they say for everything which they cannot to ascribe to anything else, he sired three sons. Two of them grew up to become partners in business. The family has now diversified into timber trading across the lane. It was the third son, Chotu as they call him, who became a problem for the family as he refused to join the business. Graduating in commerce from Khalsa College, he developed his own queer ideas about life and living. Quite an interesting character our Chotu was and is. In fact he would have become a hero of our story, but for Paharganj *thana*.

Anyhow he went off in search of 'service', the nondescript term that describes everything other than business in the lingua-franca of Paharganj. Finally he settled as a small accountant in a big firm at Lucknow. It was there, way back in the seventies, that our young man fell in love with his *malik's* daughter. That's all right since love is permissible both in law and in religion. But then the girl was a Muslim. So there began a battle royal that almost threatened to turn into a typical Hindi film scenario. Our Chotu nearly lost his job. But he converted to Islam

and gained the girl. But lost his family. For Sandhu chucked him out for renouncing the family religion.

But a few years later passions cooled and he was accepted back in the family. Blood they say is thicker than religion. Sandhu however imposed the condition; Chotu could not bring his wife home. So he often commuted between Lucknow and New Delhi, between Shahnawaz Khan and Mahinder Singh Sandhu. He lived like that until recently when the West Asian fortune of his wife's *mama* intervened otherwise.

An engineer in a contractor's company in Saudi Arabia, the old man managed to create a vacancy for an accountant. A job in the Gulf, or at least the illusion of it, is part of the Islamic existence that Chotu came to accept. So he readily jumped at it, and came to Delhi to make a passport in his name. The name of course by now was Shahnawaz Khan.

But meanwhile Delhi changed and with it the *thana* at Paharganj too, at least technologically. No more ritual raids on small time drug peddlers and endless traffic jams. It's now wanted terrorists and mindless

killings. At least that's what the news papers say. So someone who reads his newspaper everyday informed the SI that a *mona sardar* was getting a passport made for himself in the name of a Muslim. Thus our Chotu reached one of the converted rooms of that focal structure at Paharganj.

Sandhu for the first time in the half-a-century of his life at Paharganj went to the *thana* himself. Religiously he narrated the antics of his son, his job in Lucknow, his conversion marriage and the offer of a job in Saudi Arabia. All in vain. It doesn't matter, the SI seems to have told him till you pay Rs. 10000. Sandhu returned home with fear and money writ large on his mind.

Meanwhile, informed by the eldest son, Mrs. Shahnawaz Khan herself arrived from Lucknow. Having had more education than many small time traders of Paharganj, she decided she must meet the S.H.O. himself. This time the pleading was in English. The S.H.O. a very kind man understands English speaking people better. He told her politely, "Madam, you pay Rs. 25000 only and I'll set your husband free by this evening."

But our lady decided (*nawabi* blood, Sandhu says) that she was not going to pay a single pie. She also instructed the Sandhu family not to pay. Instead she traced an MP from UP, in his South Avenue apartment. They say he is a religious fundamentalist. He listened to her story and promised help. A very expensive liberal lawyer from the Supreme Court was arranged.

After a week of detention, Shahnawaz Khan alias Mohinder Singh Sandhu alias Chotu was produced in the magistrate courts at Tis Hazari, charged under Section 4(1) of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1985. Our lawyer from the Supreme Court in one of his rare appearances at Tis Hazari, recounted the story of his client and pleaded for bail. The petition was rejected and the accused was remanded for judicial custody for a fortnight. Actually there was no need for it. Where the liberal lawyer failed, the fundamentalist MP seems to have succeeded. The police with drew the case the next day.

So that's it. A man from a religious family renounces his religion for the sake of a secular love. Then the secular state accuses him of being a communal terrorist. And then a fundamentalist intervenes to rescue him back for secularism. This then is the tragedy and farce of secularism over which presides every where a police *thana*. Like the one in Paharganj. •

Brahmpura: The Hindustan Times Says It All

There is mounting evidence that a good deal of 'terrorist' violence is fuelled by lawlessness on the part of the security forces operating in Punjab. Yet, for reasons of its own, the Central

Government refuses to hold impartial undoctored enquiries into such incidents. As a result even the authority of the elected government in the state eroded, as does its credibility with the people.

CRPF Harassed Non-Sikhs Also

Continued from page 3 col 5
shouting full-throatedly: "O! C.R.P.F. men! Your Son-in-law is now present in the village; if you have the courage, you may arrest him."

Mr. Bhag Singh told the Enquiry Committee that Avtar Singh Brahma kept on repeating the warning for about fifteen minutes and shot a few rounds in the air. He then asked him (Bhag Singh) to prepare a cup of tea for them. After tea he shouted again on the loudspeaker that his men had taken positions at every turn of the village lane and they would fight a real battle with the C.R.P.F. men if they came to arrest him. He repeated the warning to the villagers to keep their doors closed to avoid any mishap. According to Mr. Bhag Singh, Avtar Singh Brahma and his associates left the village at about 9.35 p.m. whereas the C.R.P.F. men struck the village only after 10.30 p.m.

The committee was informed

by a few victims of the traumatic incident of December 27 that they were rescued by S. Darshan Singh Mann, S.H.O. of Sarhali Police Station on the morning of December 28. The persons who were made to sit the whole night in the chilly weather heard an exchange of hot words between the S.H.O. and the C.R.P.F. men. The victims could hear Mr. Mann's shouts protesting against the sacrilege of Sri Guru Granth Sahib committed by the raiding party. It was only on his intervention that the captives were released.

"It was an awful night. Remembering the atrocities committed by the C.R.P.F. men our blood boils even at the sight of a soldier," said Mr. Jagjit Singh. "If the C.R.P.F. is not withdrawn from the villages, the situation is sure to worsen further" was the collective view of the persons interviewed by the enquiry committee. •

The Hindustan Times editorial (Saturday January 24) is a pithy comment on the law and order agencies and their need to be subjected to law and order themselves.

Deep Foreboding

The Union Home Ministry may be technically right when it says that there is no legal provision under which members of the CRPF or other para-military forces can be prosecuted by the State Government under the criminal code, when they are deployed in an area on official duty. But this is only a technicality and does not exonerate the Home Ministry from the responsibility of taking departmental action against members of the paramilitary forces when they break the laws of the land. This is clearly what New Delhi should be doing in the case of the CRPF personnel who were involved in the Brahmapura incident in Punjab last month. There is an abundance of prima facie evidence to suggest that the CRPF jawans ran amuck in the village, broke open doors and molested women. Some reports suggest that they may also have committed sacrilege in the local gurdwara. There seems to have been enough truth in these charges to have provoked Mr. Ribeiro, the Director-General of Police, to

hold a Press conference and apologise to the people of Punjab for what had happened in Brahmapura. The Centre, too, apparently felt that some action was necessary because it suspended the local commandant of the CRPF, and allowed the CRPF contingent to be withdrawn from the village. But needless to say that this is no substitute for a proper inquiry into what happened and the punishment to those who were guilty of excesses whether aginst women, property or religion.

As matter stands, the Central Government's inaction cannot fail to increase the alienation of the Sikhs in Punjab. Only four months ago, 10 persons returning from Pakistan were shot dead by the BSF inside the Punjab border. The Akali Dal (Badal) and other more radical elements among the Sikhs immediately proclaimed that these "boys" had been shot in cold blood, and that this was a part of a genocidal operation launched against Sikh youth belonging to a certain age-group, in the border districts.

If reports emanating from inside the Punjab Government are to be believed, the post mortem on the victims bore they had been shot in cold blood from close range, although it is true that at least five of them were known terrorists. To make matters worse even as the Punjab Government was asking for action to be taken against the offenders, the Home Ministry endorsed the action and announced that those who had been killed were terrorists and had been shot in an encounter. Close observers of the Punjab scene feel that this

single incident destroyed the credibility of the Government's drive to restore peace through police action in Punjab, and frustrated its attempt to isolate the terrorists from the ordinary Sikhs. From then onwards more and more Sikhs have become convinced, rightly or wrongly, that in the name of restoring order, a small war is being waged against their youth. The Brahmapura episode cannot have failed to deepen this conviction. It is not entirely a coincidence that the rate of terrorist killings in Punjab has gone up sharply in the last one month, as indeed it did after the Dera Baba Nanak incident described above.

Thus, it is not merely our concern for upholding the rule of law but also a deep foreboding about the future of Punjab that prompts us to urge the Central Government not to allow the offenders in the Brahmapura incident to get off scot free. Both political theory and practice followed in other countries endorses the view that there should be a special body of administrative law to deal with infractions committed by officials of the State in the course of their duty. But in India, as things stand, there is no such corpus of law. As a result, every policeman, jawan or tax collector is above the law. From every point of view, therefore, the right course of action for the Centre is to institute an inquiry into what happened in Brahmapura and to take severe action against anyone found guilty. [Emphasis added]. •



The juxtaposition of the easily-discriminable classical line with hints of complex Cubist distortion creates an intense sense of mystery in many of the graphics. The complexity can even become overpowering, as in the more abstract drawings of Picasso's later period (untitled works 55, 58). But the artist held very clear views on the subject of critics attempting to "explain" his works: "Why not try to understand the songs of a bird?" he was once to exclaim — "In the case of a painting, people have to understand . . . people who try to explain pictures are usually barking up the wrong tree."

I must confess that while viewing his works, I was not really concerned with how they "signified the fears and aspirations of mankind, faced with the spectre of conflict and mass destruction," as our esteemed vice-president Mr. R. Venkataraman had declared in his speech opening the exhibition. Far from it. On the contrary, one felt transported to a far more perfect and permanent world, a region of constant beauty and nobility. Images of the Minotaur, lovely classical faces, artists with their models, por-

The first-ever exhibition in India of originals by Picasso, which was on at the National Gallery of Modern Art till Jan. 20, was an exciting event. Sixty significant graphics on display provided a valuable insight into the techniques, recurring motifs and images, and intellectual development of one of our century's major creative geniuses. Between 1899 and 1972, Picasso (1881-1973) produced about three thousand drawings in a wide variety of techniques and a stylistic compass ranging from pure Classicism to Cubism, the 20th century form which he evolved together with his peer, Braque. The important stages of this development were dramatically visible in the selection of graphics on that were on view from the collection of Spanish National Gallery of Modern Art.

traits of Rembrandt and Degas, fantasy landscapes, doves of peace taking flight over rainbows — all these were from some magic dream. This was art as legend —

true art that could help the spirit take wings and soar above mundane reality: the art that Camus spoke of when he said, "No artist tolerates reality".



INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS
&
NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART
PRESENT
AN EXHIBITION OF GRAPHICS BY
PABLO PICASSO

AT THE JEHANGIR NICHOLSON MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
NARIMAN POINT, BOMBAY-400021
FROM 3RD TO 15TH FEBRUARY 1987. 10.00 AM TO 7.00 PM DAILY

Picasso

POETICAL IMAGES

By Srimati Lal



Quality of Extra-Real

"The essential thing in our period of weak morale is to create enthusiasm. How many people have actually read Homer? All the same the whole world talks of him. In this way the Homeric Legend is created. The only thing that's important is the legend created by a picture . . . not whether it continues to exist itself," Picasso himself explains, with a brilliant, insightful humility. This quality of the extra-real, of 'legend', is what strikes one most about Picasso's images.

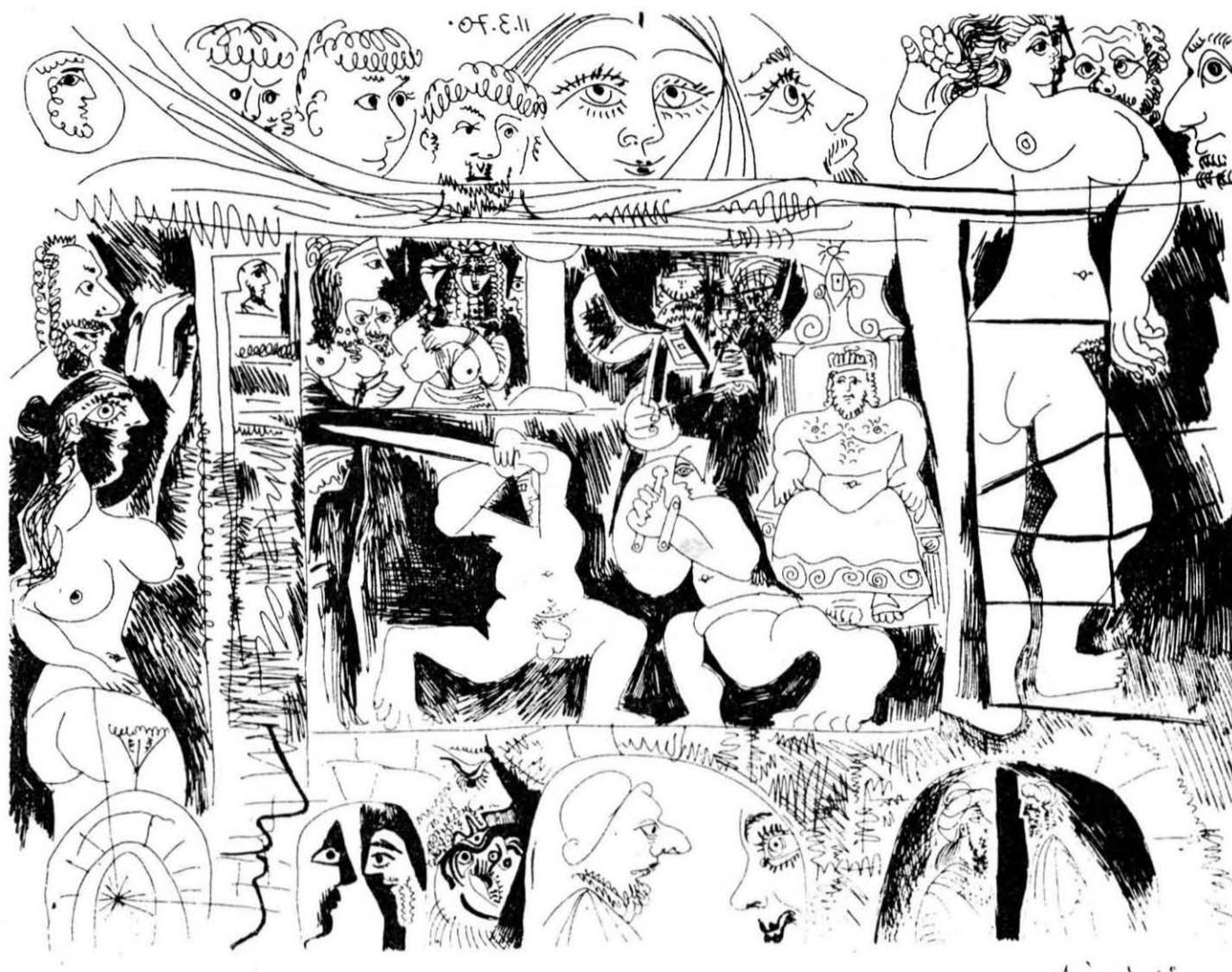
Technically, of course, the artist is completely brazen, confronting forcibly, upon a single canvas, one historical period with another far removed in time; one mood or rasa and another (the tragic, the classical, with the comic satirical, the romantic); one medium with another (ink treated for special effects with sugar, with resins, with acids; or the impact of black-and-white starkly juxtaposed with vivid primary colours, as in *Flying Dove Over the Rainbow*). All of this contributes to the final effect of the dream in drawings 55 and 58, in the *Rembrandt* portraits, in the dazzlingly abstract and semi-oriental coloured linocuts *Fauns and Head* and *Before the Lance*, and the artist-with-model studies. And an effortless finesse of line, strung with a piercing kind of sharpness, gives the picture a quality of music; carefully planned and finely orchestrated.

A New Form

It is evident that the sheer perfection of Picasso's lines, the complete, harmonious mastery as seen in works like *Francoise with*

a knot in the Hair, *Dying Minotaur* and *Young Sculptor* at work that are purely classical, necessitated for the artist the creation of and mastery over a new form: one that better represented and symbolised his own epoch. It is when one views the angular, non-conforming and protestant Cubist images that one is struck by the quality of historicity in Picasso's vision. Contemporaneity is immediately conveyed by the jagged edges and frantic rhythms of this new form and vision, yet a *Guernica* does not, and cannot, exist in this graphical world of the artist's, that is essentially wistful delicate and fanciful: "the stuff that dreams are made on".

"If the lines and form rhyme and become animated, it's like a poem. To achieve it it is not necessary to use many words . . . sometimes there is much more poetry in two or three lines than in the longest of poems," says Picasso, in an attempt to explain the exquisite stylization and precision of his drawings. The magic of the artist's visions lies in the achievement of this poetry. It is pointless to try and 'explain' this magic further. Picasso had a maniacal distrust of over-academic art critics and theorists: "Critics, mathematicians, scientists and busybodies want to classify everything, marking boundaries and limits, making one thing prevail over another; when, in reality, two statements can exist at the same time. In art, there is room for all possibilities . . ." Picasso's own statements taken from *Picasso on Art* by Dore Ashton



Untitled/11.3.1970
45.3 x 56.8 cm. mounting
31.6 x 42 cm. plate



Dying Minotaur/30.5.1933/(Suite Vollard 90)
34.2 x 44.5 cm. mounting
19.5 x 27 cm. plate



Untitled/19 and 20.4.1970
50.5 x 65.5 cm. mounting
36.8 x 48.9 cm. plate



Untitled/18.8.1968
28 x 35.2 cm. mounting
15 x 20.7 cm. plate

Call for 'Cease Fire', Moratorium on Violence Delhi Declaration on Punjab

Reported by B.G. Verghese
Former Editor-in-Chief Indian Express

A hint of possible overtures and opportunity for a settlement despite escalating violence in Punjab emerged from a Dialogue on Punjab in Delhi on Thursday January 15 at which all points of view including some reflecting the sentiments of extremist groups were represented.

It was agreed that the unity and integrity of India was not in question and that Khalistan is a cry of frustration of a limited number of angry and alienated youth with only a few hard core elements committed to it.

Violence from every quarter was unanimously condemned as abhorrent especially against innocent persons, particularly women and children, and seen as achieving nothing. **The meeting raised its voice against terrorism as well as torture, excesses and indignities by security forces. No one is above the law and uniformed forces must be visibly accountable for their actions.**

A suggestion that met with wide approval was that there should be an all-round moratorium on all types of violence with effect from January 26. There should be no terrorist killings while the Government, for its part, should redeploy its forces, suspend search and seizure operations, and avoid repression.

The object would be to create conditions favourable to the initiation of dialogue and the implementation of measures calculated to restore credibility, confidence, community relations and the political process.

The emotional and psychological factors leading to anger and alienation were seen as key elements

in the situation. The causative factors must be removed. It was also pointed out that the emotional factor was important on both sides.

Among those attending the Dialogue, convened by a group of concerned citizens, were Mr Balwant Singh, Finance Minister of Punjab, Capt Amarinder Singh, (Akali Dal Badal Group); Jathedar Harcharan Singh (Secretary UAD, and SGPC); Major (retd) Jagjit Singh (Taksal group); Baba Amte; Dinesh Singh (Congress-I); Harkishen Singh Surjeet (CPI-M); Avtar Singh Malhotra (CPI); Prof G.S. Shergill (Principal Khalsa College, Amritsar); Krishan Kant; Rajinder Sachar; Ram Jethmalani; Rajni Kothari; Prem Shankar Jha; MJ Akbar; Sukhjit Singh; Pai Panandiker; N.K. Mukarji; Bhabani Sengupta; K F Rustamji; P Rosha; Lt Gen J.S. Aurora (Retd); Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh (Retd); Chandan Mitra; Balwant Singh Ramoowalia, M.P.; Gulzar Singh Sandhu; Avtar Singh Hit (Secretary Akali Dal-Badal / DPGC); Bhuvnesh Chaturvedi, M.P.; Radhakrishna (Gandhi Peace Foundation); Bhagwant Singh Dilawari; H.S. Bhanwar;

Viren Shah; Rajendra Sa-reen; Shaminder Singh, M.P.; Baljit Malik; Pran Chopra; Harji Malik; Baljit Singh; M.K. Rasgotra; Gur-bachan Singh; Kuldip Nayar; Narinder Singh; Trilochan Singh; R.S. Narula; Anita Singh; Javid Laiq; Jagjit Singh Anand, Eric Gonsalves; Col Thanwar Singh; Amrik Singh; and B.G. Verghese.

Inder Gujral and Patwant Singh moderated the discussion.

Removal of Causes of Violence

It was agreed that violence could be ended only by removing its causes. Among other things this would entail restoring a sense of dignity, honour, safety and justice among all minorities within and outside Punjab — a task for both governments and society. **Those responsible for the November 1984 killings must be identified and punished. The many innocent held in detention in Jodhpur and elsewhere, including political prisoners, should be immediately released. Others should be permitted to be interviewed in their places of detention so that their minds could be known.** It was said that many or most detenus wanted to end terrorism and were willing or could be persuaded to give assurances that would be found generally acceptable to the nation.

If the Prime Minister were to signal that the Government will respond to such assurances, steps could be initiated to set such a constructive process in motion and commence a meaningful dialogue.

While some felt that the Punjab Accord had outlived its utility as its non-implementation by the Centre had led to a serious erosion of credibility, and others suggested a new accord, the general view was that the Accord still has validity and provides some anchorage which should be strengthened.

Continued on page 9 col 1

Perceptions From The Delhi Dialogue on Punjab

"The current struggle in Punjab is to restore the honour of the Sikhs?"

"If Sikh youth in Punjab and Sikhs elsewhere cannot protect themselves and their families, how can they help to defend the country."

Akali Activist

"Sikh masses must be advised against extremism. This should be the task of all political parties."

"Any future agreement on Punjab should not bypass the accord."

— CPM Member

"The nation is travelling down the wrong road in Punjab."

"The violence is designed from outside to destroy India."

"The accord must be implemented."

— A Senior Editor

"There appears to be more response from the government to 'Khalistan' than all the real pending problems in the state."

— Social worker in Baba Amtes Group

"The guilty men of 1984 must be punished."

"Barnala misjudged the June 30, 1986 police action in the Golden Temple. He should have stood up to pressure from the Centre."

— BJP M.P.

"The killing must stop, the political process reactivated and a 3 month long ceasefire should be announced."

"A new accord should be hammered out in a spirit of forgive and forget."

— Political Scientist and Leading Columnist.

"The struggle in Punjab is against the zulum (wrong) done to the Sikhs."

"The accord was arrived at in too much hurry. The youth will have to be involved. Come to the taksal, talk to the boys."

— Sikh Activist

"It is still not too late. The nation must conscript its conscience for Punjab. In seeking a solution, the truth cannot be accompanied by a bodyguard of lies."

— Baba Amte

"A climate is being created that terrorists can only be dealt with by stepping out of the law. This is extremely dangerous."

— Ex Inspector General of Police

"Buta Singh is the greatest disaster for resolving the Punjab crisis."

"There must be immediate talks with the youth; even with those who are in Jodhpur Jail." Simranjeet Singh Mann should be released.

He can be a key figure to work out a political settlement.

— Supreme Court Lawyer,

"The first step: Punish the guilty of 1984." "The nation feels let down by disunity in Akali ranks. Akali unity is essential for any settlement."

— Civil Liberties Leader

The
Forum
Gazette

- Minority Rights
- Civil Liberties
- Equality for Women
- Democratic Values
- Environmental Protection

Delhi Declaration

Continued from page 8 col 3

Various suggestions were made on the specific issues of Chandigarh and water but there was unanimity that time should not be lost by waiting for the Haryana poll to be over. Politically partisan action must be avoided. None would really gain by such tactics; India would certainly lose.

Restore Communal Amity

Another matter that the gathering felt required urgent and concerted attention was that of restoring communal amity in the true religious tradition of Punjab and in consonance with the bonds of common culture. The game of mass killings to provoke fear, migration and a backlash must be exposed and countered.

Role of Media

In these tasks the media, it was said, could play a constructive role by exercising restraint, avoiding sensationalism and by reporting matters objectively after due verification. There must be no censorship. Positive developments must be reported and published with some prominence. Threats to the media and magistracy in discharging their responsibilities fairly were equally deplored.

Restore Political Process

There was consensus on the imperative need to restore the political process by all parties and at all levels; to secure united action in fulfillment of these urgent national goals; to undertake mass mobilisation; and to win over the youth of Punjab. Akali unity was seen as of great importance and an appeal was made to all the Akali factions to close ranks and work together. President's rule and calling out the Army for security duties in Punjab were strongly disfavoured by most as steps liable to

exacerbate the situation. Law and order and other administrative measures must be accompanied by political initiatives. Economic uncertainty and discontent must also be countered, and the youth given a vision of the future through the unfolding of a policy to build a New Punjab.

External Factor

The external factor in the Punjab situation was noted, with people moving both ways across the border with Pakistan, including heroin peddlars, smugglers and other criminal elements. However, some felt that the proposal to seal the border was not feasible while others argued that mass mobilisation and political action in Punjab render external influences ineffective.

Expression of Regret

The idea of a moratorium on violence on all sides, referred to earlier, was accompanied by a suggestion that this could perhaps be set out with a preamble giving assurance of restoration of honour and dignity to all and an expression of regret at the turn events had taken.

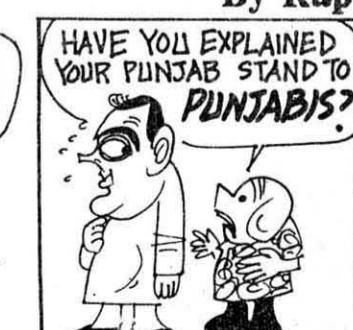
The meeting concluded with an appeal to all parties and groups to go to Punjab to undertake mass mobilisation, contact the youth, revive the political process and work for peace and communal amity. All were agreed that time is running out and urgent action is necessary, building on positive elements in the situation which is otherwise causing deep concern to all.

Despite the expression of many divergent views, the discussion was conducted without recrimination or rancour and in a spirit of shared concern for the common good and the national interest. •

NEWSHOUND



By Rap



The Other Side of Hindu-Sikh Amity

Jyoti Punwani writes from Bombay that there is a trend in the city for Sikhs to appeal for cooperation and security from avowedly communal and chauvinist sections of the dominant Hindu majority, such as the R.S.S. and the Shiv Sena. If this process develops further, even in the name of Hindu-Sikh amity, it would be setting a dangerous precedent for cooperation on a communal basis.

Since Operation Blue Star, the divide between Hindus and Sikhs has grown. With it have also grown efforts to preserve and maintain the historic traditional relations between the communities. These efforts were most evident during the anti-Sikh violence in Delhi in November 84, which culminated in the formation and coalition of voluntary groups determined not to fall in line with what seemed to be the official line of allowing Sikhs to become alienated from the national mainstream. Many of the groups which came into existence and joined hands, were entirely secular in outlook. The best example being the Nagrik Ekta Manch in Delhi and various civil liberties and democratic rights organisations.

Following the November '84 violence, various sectarian and/or communal (as against community-based) organisations also became active in efforts to project Hindu-Sikh unity. One such organisation is the Bombay-based Rashtriya Ekjoot, which has of late been forging ties with the city's Sikhs.

However, the motivations and origin of this group reveal a controversial side of attempts to forge Hindu-Sikh unity. **Rashtriya Ekjoot** was formed in the wake of the Centre's decision to enact the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, with the express aim of opposing the Bill. It held demonstrations against the Bill outside Cong (I) MPs' home in Bombay, publicly burnt copies of the Bill, and also sat in a charkha at Hutatma Chowk, demanding a common civil code.

However, unlike other groups who opposed the Bill, Rashtriya Ekjoot's objections were based on the fear that the Bill snacked of "separatist tendencies" and went against the country's "unity and integrity". It is for the same reason of 'unity and integrity' that Ekjoot demands a common civil code, according to advocate S.S. Desai, the General Secretary.

The President of Rashtriya Ekjoot is Vidyadhar Gokhale, well-known Marathi writer and journalist, equally well-known for his RSS views.

RSS Front

At the time of its formation, Ekjoot was judged as no more than a BJP-front; more correctly an RSS-front. But Desai insists that none of its activists are involved in political parties. The leading luminaries in Ekjoot, like Desai, Gokhale and Arvind Godbole reject the notion of Semitic influence on the Sikh religion. They point out that the teachings of the Sikh gurus were derived from the Vedas, not and not from Semitic traditions. They cite the very word 'guru' to 'prove' their point that Sikhism is a part of Hinduism.

While Ekjoot has shown enthusiasm to extend its solidarity to the Sikhs in the interests of 'unity and integrity', it has not taken the initiative to allay the fears of the Muslims. General Secretary Desai is firm in his views about minorities. He believes that "the more concessions you give them, the more separatist they become

According to his line of thinking it is obvious that whereas Sikhs should be taken as being part of the Hindu tradition, other religions like Islam and Christianity should be treated differently as minority religions.

It is no coincidence that Ekjoot's favourite term of reference, the words "unity and integrity", are being used to whip up a Hindu patriotic frenzy. Again, not surprisingly, Rashtriya Ekjoot believes that singing the national anthem must be made compulsory.

Dangerous Trend

The danger in this kind of approach to Hindu-Sikh unity comes from its intention: it is Hindus and Sikhs against Muslims; indeed, not just Hindus and Sikhs, but Hindus-i.e., Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, against the "alien" religions of Islam and Christianity.

When the ruling party is doing its best to sustain a Hindu chauvinist mood whipped up since Operation Blue Star, and minorities are at the receiving end, this sort of unity plays into the hands of those who have little sympathy for the rights of minorities. Communal amity and cooperation can surely not be furthered through appeals to chauvinist organisations who think that patriotism and nationalism are their monopoly. •

Do You Want A Bonded Press?

The Prime Minister's Deputy Information Adviser, Mani Shankar Aiyar, has written an angry letter to the editor-in-chief of the Indian Express. Aiyar did not like the way in which the Indian Express criticised the 5 crore cultural extravaganza called 'Apna Utsav' held recently in Delhi. He has called the press reporters 'lumpens' and said the press lacks credibility. Aiyar's letter has serious implications on press freedom. Should Indian press be a copy book of AIR and Doordarshan? Should the PM's secretariat prescribe as to how the press should conduct itself — what to write and what not to write?

Madhu Dandavate wrote to the prime minister, strongly protesting against Mani Shankar Aiyar's letter. Dandavate sees this action of PM's adviser as an attempt to browbeat various forces sustaining democracy. The text of the letter:

The full text of a letter written by your Deputy Press Adviser, Mani Shankar Aiyar, to Sumen Dubey, Editor-in-Chief of the Indian Express on November 26, 1986 has been published in sections of the Press.

He seems to be very much disturbed by the criticism in the press about the 'Apna Ustav'. In his anxiety and enthusiasm to defend the 'Apna Ustav' organised by the Government he has carried on a tirade against press and has alleged that it lacks "credibility". He has lashed out at the reporters as "lumpens" because they showed the temerity to express their lack of appreciation of 'Apna Ustav'.

Casting aspersions on the Press, Mani Shankar Aiyar, in his letter, has commented that "collectively the Press establishment's hackles rose when the Prime Minister complained of the whiners and groners at the 'Hitavada' function last month".

Your Deputy Advisor may

honestly differ with the assessment of the Press about the Apna Utsava, but using his official position he has no business to make such sweeping and derogatory remarks against the journalists and have the arrogance to teach them 'ethics'.

Mani Shankar Aiyar forgets that ours is supposed to be a free society endowed with a free press. Do you want it to be replaced by a 'bonded' Press that will dance to the tune of the Government and offer an orchestrated appreciation of the festivals organised by Government?

In a democracy conscious people, vigilant Parliament, independent judiciary and a fearless Press provide the checks and balances of democracy. An attempt to brow-beat any one of them is an attempt to subvert democracy itself.

I only hope that your concept of press relations is not based on intimidation but on freedom of Press.

Madhu Dandavate, M.P.

The Man Who Founded A Great Newspaper

HOW THE HINDUSTAN TIMES WAS BORN IN AMRITSAR

Udyo

For the majority of living Indians today it will be a matter of great surprise to learn that there was a time earlier in this century when the capital of India, Delhi, had no English language newspaper. It was indeed a major lacuna for the freedom struggle which was gaining momentum and communication through media was an absolute necessity. Such a situation prevailed since no one had the enterprise to start an English language newspaper; nor did the British attach enough importance to launch a paper to promote their own interests.

It was also a time Sikh issues and politics were hotting up and their growing interests naturally fostered an ambition to start a newspaper. **Sardar Mangal Singh**, who was then the President of the Gurudwara Committee in Amritsar, thought up the idea of starting an English language newspaper. But as expected, he and his friends wanted it from Amritsar, the holy city of the Sikhs.

Akali politics were day by day getting stronger during the early twenties. The urgency of starting the proposed paper was being felt in concerned circles of the Akali Dal. Eventually they found a man who could translate their idea into reality. The man was no other than **Sardar K.M. Panikkar**. Panikkar visited Amritsar on a special mission on behalf of Gandhiji. It was during this visit that he had a

meeting with Sardar Mangal Singh.

Panikkar's Advice

Panikkar advised Mangal Singh of the futility of starting an English daily from a district centre like Amritsar, even though it was the holiest of holy places for the Sikh community. The 'Sardar' from Travancore promised them all help, but only if the paper was published from Delhi instead of Amritsar. However, Panikkar's suggestion was not accepted initially. Mangal Singh and his associates argued that the paper could represent the Sikh community only if it was published from Amritsar. In reality Delhi was most suited to support a daily newspaper and ultimately Panikkar's sound suggestion was accepted.

Thus the premier daily, Hindustan Times, was founded under the editorship of Sardar K.M. Panikkar with Sardar Mangal Singh as its first owner and publisher.

Panikkar also made it clear that the paper as a national daily would deal with national politics and not be used as a vehicle for the partisan interests of a particular community or a group within a community.

Teething Troubles

Mangal Singh and Panikkar had to overcome many problems. Delhi, in those days, had very few compositors to cope with English types. There was



Sardar Mangal Singh, who founded and first published the Hindustan Times

also no press foreman who could efficiently run a large press.

Panikkar started with two assistants, G.S. Raghavan and Dr. Ambadi Krishna Menon. Raghavan was competent in every department of a newspaper from composing and selecting types to writing leading articles. He took a salary of Rs. 500/- and side by side borrowed from everyone to lead an extravagant life. He loved the good things of life, and had them with borrowed money!

Mangal Singh, despite difficulties, put his energy and resources into the paper and the Hindustan Times made good progress.

The first issue was inaugurated by Gandhiji in 1924 and it

carried articles by Motilal Nehru, Maulana Mohammad Ali, Jawa-harlal Nehru and other leading lights of the freedom movement. Being the only English language newspaper, it soon attracted wide attention with its high standard of journalism.

'Cotton Epidemic' In Travancore

There is an interesting example of how the paper got involved in a controversy in its early years, but emerged from it with a reputation for fearless, unbiased journalism. In the erstwhile princely State of Travancore, the Maharajah Sri Mulam Thirunal passed away. His successor Maharani Sri Sethu Lakshmi Bai took over the reigns of government. At that

time the British Resident was CHS Cotton who had a reputation for unduly interfering in the administration. Hindustan Times correspondents reported the news, and after ascertaining the facts, the story was published in the paper under the headline "Cotton Epidemic in Travancore". An official inquiry was underway. The publication of the story attracted adverse comment from a section of the Nair community, which was pro-cotton ... but the paper did not retract from its position.

Change Of Ownership

The negotiations between the Government and Sikhs were completed by the end of February the same year. But the settlement had a negative effect on the newspaper. The Sikhs were losing interest in the Hindustan Times and wanted to sell the paper either to Motilal Nehru or to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Panikkar put up a proposition to Sardar Mangal Singh that in case the paper had to change hands, it should be sold to Motilal Nehru. But it was too late. In March that year Mangal Singh had already sold the paper to Malaviyaji. Malaviyaji and Lala Lajpat Rai jointly took over the management of the Hindustan Times. Thus ended the Sikh control of the first English daily founded by them in Delhi and also the brilliant editorship of the paper by Sardar K.M. Panikkar.

in their media. Even the PM's remarks warning Pakistan not to meddle in our activities received front-page headlines.

But do you think such a feeling is justified?

Well, if I was a Pakistani, I would feel the same way. Everybody in Pakistan seems to have this belief that as soon as the Punjab problem is felt to go out of control this Indian government will launch a military attack on them.

And how do they react to the extremist issue in general?

There is a sneaking sympathy for the Khalistani. Largely because they feel that the Hindus had been victimising Muslims and that now the situation had come to be the same for the Sikhs. In fact, they are happy to see a discontented India. When we have trouble they highlight it as we do their troubles in our media. When Muslims are killed here, like in the Bangalore riots recently, Pakistani papers screamed 'Gyarah Mussalman Shaheed' (11 Muslims martyred).

How has Pakistan reacted to the entire concept of Islamisation?

The only evidence of Islamisation in Pakistan are the newly-built mosques and an enormous amount of propaganda. Other than that hard liquor is easily available. Corruption is rampant, drug trafficking is common, and there are fewer burkha-clad women on the streets. Most surprisingly, this time I found many women dressed in saris at social gatherings.

In Pakistan with Khushwant Singh

KKhushwant Singh recently returned from a "trip down memory lane" to Pakistan, which he last visited on the day Bhutto was assassinated.

Speaking to LAKHINDER VOHRA on his impressions of Pakistan today, he thought that the time was not yet ripe for a 'revolution' there and that Benazir hardly posed any threat to the military dictatorship.

Excerpts From The Interview:

What was the purpose of your recent visit to Pakistan?

I had been invited to a wedding in Lahore. In fact that was an excuse to make a trip down memory lane to my ancestral home in Hadali beyond Sar-godha, as I am working on my autobiography and I wanted to refresh my memory of my childhood days.

How long would you take to finish the autobiography?

I have just begun to work on it. I've finished writing about the days when I was close to the Nehru-Gandhi family. About Nehru, Sanjay and the stormy relations between Maneka the 'bahu' and the 'saas'.

How do you describe your visit?

The enormous welcome a Sikh gets there is fantastic. Fortunately for me, the day I

landed in Lahore I found my picture on the front page of **The Jang**, Pakistan's leading newspaper. They had published extracts from an article I had written on the falsification of history — as to how Indian history had been moulded so as to form an anti-muslim bias. In fact, that article proved to be my passport to Pakistani hospitality. Almost the entire village in Hadali gathered to give me a rousing reception. **They were all flattered when I called my visit my Haj and Humra.** I was then taken to my ancestral home which is occupied by Muslim refugees from Rohatak. All in all, Indians don't give visiting Pakistanis the same kind of grand treatment.

You said you last visited Pakistan some years ago. Have things changed since then?

Yes, I was there the day they hanged Bhutto. I was the only Indian journalist in Islamabad. He had not become a legend and there were hardly any demonstrations or violence. People seemed so grief-stricken over his death that they just couldn't react. I went to Karachi the following day expecting trouble but nothing happened. The resurgence of the Bhutto mystique came about only a few years ago. He is now regarded as a folk hero and a champion of the poor. But one must remember that today Zia-ul-Haq may not be loved but he is not

hated. He is respected. He is a dictator but is considered to be a pious man. His personal life is above reproach and there is not even a breath of scandal about him or any of his family members. So I don't see any serious threat to his leadership.

About the recent riots in Karachi, the so-called resignations, etc, How did the people react?

The reactions have been quite sharp. The flashpoint came after trouble had been brewing in Karachi for some time between the Afghan refugees and the Bihari Muslims. In fact the Afghans who look refuge on the pretext of training to fight the Russians, have over the years settled down to a comfortable life. To a large extent, an anti-Afghani feeling has developed among the people who hold the refugees responsible for all the illegal trade in drugs, arms, etc. Moreover, the Afghans being aggressive in nature, the clashes became inevitable. The people in Karachi and elsewhere have reacted with a sense of shame to all this but they feel that the Afghans should go back to their own country and fight.

Please comment on Benazir's position, vis-a-vis Zia. Can she overthrow him?

She lacks the kind of support Zia seems to have among the masses. People do come in large numbers to listen to her, young men are critical of the

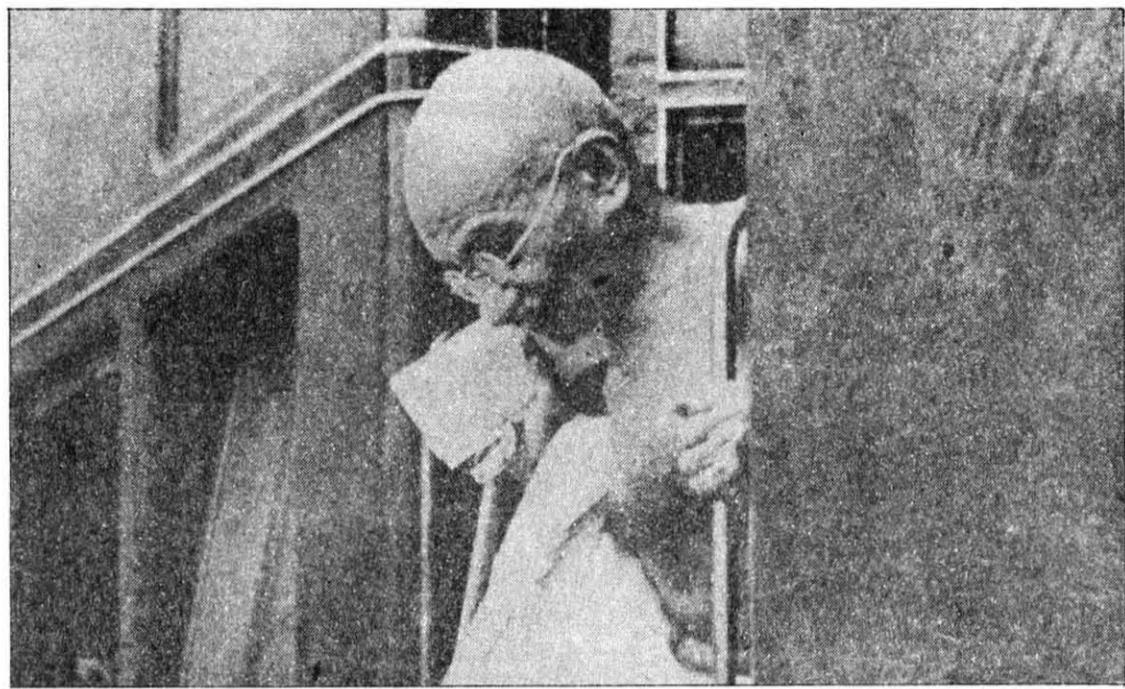
government and do want a change but the feeling is not yet so strong as to overthrow Zia. In fact, the traditionalists fiercely oppose Benazir, especially during her mammoth rallies. They are notorious for their anti-Benazir slogans. As I am told, some of them go like this: *Bahiya sharam karo, Apni behn da vyaah karo; Zia nahin te Junejo naal Nikaah karo.* (Brethren, have shame. Get your sister married. If not Zia, then get her married to Junejo.)

Coming to the Punjab problem, to what extent do the Pakistanis admit they are involved?

They flatly deny any links with the extremists. Most of them feel that if there was an element of truth in the reported allegations of our government, something concrete would have come up by now. Even the Somayya Committee which recently went to Pakistan proved to be a flop. They had video tapes and some other miscellaneous evidence to prove the involvement. But as I am told, their evidence was not conclusive enough.

To what extent does a fear psychosis of a military attack from India exist in Pakistan?

They are obsessed with it. They know that India is strong and with the Russians round the corner, they are haunted by this fear. And that's why Gorba-chev's visit featured prominently



Gandhi and the Punjab*

S.L. Malhotra

Sikhs belong to the martial races of the Punjab. During the war their number in the army rose from 35,000 at the beginning of 1915 to over 100,000 by the end of the war. So they were considered incapable of carrying on a non-violent struggle. Gandhi was even advised by some of his friends to refrain from putting the idea of non-cooperation before the Sikhs. But their performance in the non-violent non-cooperation belied all such fears. Lajpat Rai wrote to Gandhi, "The Sikh non-cooperators have set a noble example . . . The Sikh community has so far kept its temper admirably well in spite of the provocations given . . . Our Sikh friends deserve all the praise one can bestow on brave, noble sufferers in the cause of truth." In reply, Gandhi observed, "Their resolute behaviour, their religious fervour, their calmness and their suffering command my highest admiration . . ." Similar was the finding of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee. Answering the question as to why the movement had remained more or less free from violence, the report of the Committee says, "The answer, clear and conclusive, is given by the outstanding feature of the situation that it is the martial races of Northern India, both in the Punjab and the United Provinces, who, while smarting under brutal treatment, have maintained the most wonderful self-restraint."

The training that the Sikhs received in the use of the new weapon added a new chapter to the history of their community in the Punjab. They made use of the new technique in reforming their religious and social institutions. They applied the method of non-violent struggle in establishing the control of their community over their religious shrines known as 'gurdwaras' which had been under the control of individuals known as 'mahants', some of whom did not bear a good reputation. In a large number of cases the lands and the properties attached to the 'gurdwaras' were entered in their names. Some, like the

Golden Temple, the temples at Nankana and Panja Sahib, had large jagirs attached to them. The management of the Golden Temple at Amritsar was in the hands of the head priest who was under the control and supervision of the Deputy Commissioner.

Before the formation of the

despite latter's efforts to appease them. A new organisation of the Sikhs known as the Sikh League was formed. Its leaders decided to acquire control over the Golden Temple. The radical elements among the Sikhs organised a semi-military corps of volunteers known as the Akali Dal (army of immortals.) It was

Patiala, of 36 gentlemen which was to recommend ways and means for the better management of the gurdwaras. This was interpreted by the Sikhs as an undue interference in their religious affairs by the Government. So some of their leaders constituted a committee consisting of 175 members to be known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.) for the management of all Sikh shrines.

The S.G.P.C decided to acquire control over the gurdwara at Nankana Sahib which at that time was under the possession of mahant Narain Das who did not bear a good moral reputation. The committee announced a 'diwan' to be held on February 20, 1921 at a place near Nankana Sahib. The mahant employed a number of bad characters in order to resist the

heroically and valiantly sacrificed their lives for their faith. If they had acted otherwise, there must have been greater casualties amongst the mahant's people."

The Government tried to pacify the Sikhs by taking action against the culprits. Twenty-nine persons were arrested. The management was handed over to the Khalsa Panth. The Governor, accompanied by a number of officials, visited the place of the tragedy. The Sikh leaders, on the other hand, made use of the inflamed sentiments of the people for extending their control over all the gurdwaras. April 5, 1921 was fixed as the Nankana Sahib Martyrs' Day. The Sikhs were asked to wear black turbans in memory of the martyrs of Nankana Sahib. Sikh leadership now passed into the hands of those who favoured opposition to the Government. Gandhi's non-cooperation movement held great appeal for them. Kharak Singh, a follower of Gandhi, was elected president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. The Government turned hostile to the office-bearers of the Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee on account of their avowed connection with the non-cooperation movement. In order to take control out of the hands of the new Committee, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar took the keys of the treasury of the Golden Temple and planned to hand them over to his own nominee. This led to an agitation by the S.G.P.C which resulted in the arrest and conviction of about 198 persons, including three successive presidents, four successive secretaries and practically the whole of the Working Committee of the S.G.P.C. Despite grave provocations by the Government and its agents the agitation remained non-violent that made Gandhi remark, "When born fighters become non-violent, they exhibit courage of the highest order."

Ultimately the Government was compelled to seek a compromise. It offered to return the keys of the Golden Temple on certain conditions. But the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee insisted on unconditional release of all the prisoners as the first condition of a settlement. Without even waiting for all the terms of a settlement, the Government announced its decision to release all Sikh prisoners. But the S.G.P.C. insisted on the release of non-Sikh prisoners, too, who had been arrested in connection with the agitation relating to the Key Affair. Commending this attitude of the S.G.P.C., Gandhi wrote, "The Sikh awakening seems to be truly wonderful. Not only has Akali party become a party of effective non-violence but it is evolving a fine code of honour . . ."

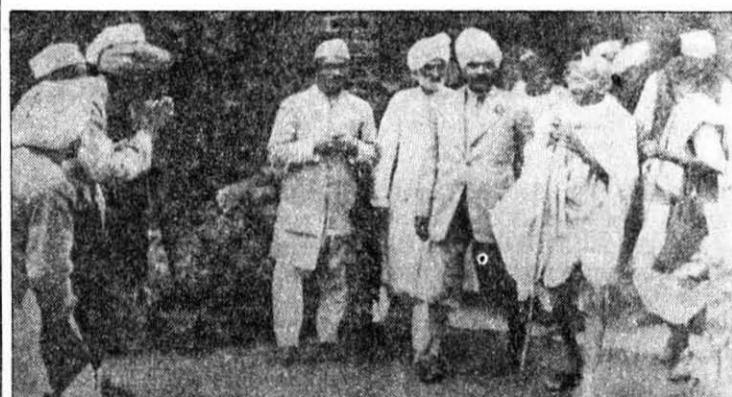
On the assurance of the Government that the Hindu prisoners also would be released, the S.G.P.C agreed to a settlement whereby the keys were restored to it. Gandhi described the unconditional return of the keys of the Golden Temple as the "first decisive battle won."

* From *Gandhi and the Punjab* — S.L. Malhotra; Punjab University - 1970.



Gandhiji in pre-partition Punjab

Sikh League, the Singh Sabha made some efforts to gain control over the gurdwaras but being loyal to the Government it was hardly in a position to take any direct action against the Government. Its endeavours to achieve its end through petitions and redress from courts did not yield any significant success. This produced resentment and consternation in the community. An incident at Delhi in 1912 created a stir among Sikhs in the Punjab. In the course of building of the new capital the Government acquired land attached to gurdwara Rikab Ganj and demolished an old boundary wall. Radical elements among the Sikhs challenged the mahant's right to alienate gurdwara property and condemned the demolition of the wall as sacrilegious. But the clash between the Government and Sikhs was averted as a result of the commencement of the War. But on the restoration of peace in 1918, the agitation against the control of gurdwaras by individuals reappeared with greater vigour which brought the Sikhs in conflict with the Government



to raise and train men for action in taking over the gurdwaras from recalcitrant mahants.

In pursuance of their aim of freeing the Golden Temple from the official control, some of the Akali volunteers broke a time-old tradition maintained by the 'mahants' by accepting the 'karah parshad offerings' from the untouchable-baptised Sikhs and presented it before the Granth Sahib against the wishes of the priests. The latter left the temple in protest. The Akalis immediately took control of the temple. The Government tried to assert its authority over the temple by constituting a committee, through the Maharaja of

according to him, was that the party entered the gurdwara as worshippers and on being attacked they did not retaliate and willingly died under a vow not to use violence in connection with the gurdwara movement. In that case, he added, "the martyrs showed courage and resignation of the martyrs-order of which the Sikhs, India and the whole world had every reason to be proud." He, therefore, designated their deeds as an act of national bravery.

According to Girdhari Lal, a Congress leader of Lahore, "the members of the Jatha truly followed their leader and did not use their kirpans at all but



The Peasant and the White Man

Khamsing Srinawak

The village is no more than 20 kilometers to the north of Bangkok. Its houses are strung along a canal each separated from the other by a water-filled ditch and a boundary of small trees. Most of them are low with atop roofs sloping down almost to the raised earth beneath. The sleeping platform and kitchen are waist high and their wooden floors are wide enough to accommodate the family. What space there is in the house is partitioned by flower-patterned cotton hangings. In front of each house is a crudely made bench or upended logs for friends to sit on when they stop by to chat. In the dry season, the treadmill, rake and plough are kept under the raised floor of the sleeping room; the chickens roost there in the rainy season. Close by each house is a haystack and a buffalo shed.

The house, or more precisely, hut of Uncle Khong is not much different from the others. The absence, however, of a haystack

and buffalo shed does not mean he is a special class of peasant who does not have to work for the name, only that at his age, no longer having the strength to wrestle with the soil, he superannuated himself.

The life of true peasants like Khong is uncomplicated, predetermined. When the rains come, they plough, then seed, then replant. If the rain is good, there's enough rice left over to sell, and if too much, they buy rice with what condiments, shrimp paste and fish sauce they need on credit and wait to redeem themselves the following year. You can think of it as fate or call it, more flatteringly as the townspeople do, heroism, and you would not be far wrong. Khong preferred to regard himself as heroic because, though he had not even a dot of land of his own, he was still able to provide for his wife and the many animals that depended on him as well as others provided for their families. If he had had children, he was sure

he could do as well for them. In this vein, he boasted with Khem, his girl-friend, bride and now old woman.

'If we had kids, I could do right by them, couldn't I, dear?'

'Yes, yes,' she acknowledged, busy feeding all their six dogs. Never failing to give his pride a flip, she added, even if we had six, they wouldn't eat more than this pack. That Somrit of yours alone eats more than the both of us together.'

Khong glanced at the gangly puppy, legs spread, belly bloated, slurping rice gravy from a coconut shell. Being childless probably explained his fondness for animals. In his prime, he kept the lot from buffaloes to fighting cocks and fish. But as age advanced and energy declined, realising he could no longer care for all, he sold them, even his partner in life, the buffalo. This did no great harm, though, for his work had already changed its character. Formerly, his aim in growing rice was to earn enough to have

extra money to spend and to donate at least as much as others to charity. Later he was satisfied if enough grew to feed his family for the year. As his capacity for heavy work ebbed, he took to gathering lotus leaves and stems from the paddy field ditches for sale to market vendors. This gave him enough for each day. Later, as he had an honest and grateful nature, the gentleman owner of the land he lived on was kind enough to ask him to oversee and collect rents from the newcomers. But then, the buffalo was no longer needed. As Khong's eyesight grew poor and his hair turned grey, he could no longer defend his chickens from the wiles of the new generation of children and he gave up trying to look after them. They were given away to whoever asked for them. Six dogs, four cats and a few left-over hens remained.

Khong did not fancy the six equally; some he kept out of pity, but the one he really loved was 'old Somrit', the one his

wife referred to. In fact, Somrit was only the spotted bitch's puppy and was born under the hut. His colour was strange, though not mottled like his mother nor dark like his father who Khong guessed was Blackie. Apart from his funny colour, he differed from the other dogs in other ways: his ears stuck out and his eyes were small, like an elephant's.¹ The old man had thought that when he was a little older he would name him 'Elephant'. But he was called 'Somrit' because of an event one day, three months before. His landlord when leading a group of multi-lingual foreigners in a boat along the canal had stopped at his hut to exchange pleasantries and to give him another job — to show the paddy field land and point out its boundaries to those interested. He willingly accepted. Just before leaving, the landlord noticed Somrit frolicking with a playmate in front of the house and exclaimed, 'What an odd pup! you should call it 'Somrit' — after all it means brassy-gold. That's his colour.' All the visitors agreed. When they left, Khong, feeling he loved the dog twice as much, clucked him over and patted his head, and from then on called him 'Somrit'.

The old man performed his new assignment enthusiastically. During those days, anyone pass-

ing down the canal who glanced at the bank would be apt to hear an old man in an old black shirt sitting together with his dog in the shade of a bamboo grove call out, 'Have you come to see my landlord's land? Some said they had, others tittered and occasionally the old man would laugh at himself for mistakenly addressing one of his own villagers. Those who did want to see the land were shown around with all the alacrity desired by the owner. Hearing new things in his talks with these people and walking side by side with persons he thought were millionaires made him happy. Occasionally, a nice person would give him a cigarette and even offer to light it.

For several days, Khong watched with curiosity a smallish boat punted upstream occupied sometimes by only one passenger, sometimes by several, which, as it approached his perch, would head into the thicket behind his hut. Though he thought they might be people coming to look at the land, to approach them would be inopportune. If they had come to see it, they would inevitably come to him for information. The boat appeared in the afternoon and remained until sunset. Sometimes the old man saw one of its passengers jump onto the bank — a big man in a grey shirt wearing a bell-shaped peasant's hat, looking up and looking down and finally disappearing into a clump of trees. At the beginning of the second week, the man could contain himself no longer and decided to take a look. With a snap of his fingers, he got Somrit moving and went along by the canal, the dog running ahead. When Somrit barked loudly, Khong quickened his pace and heard the dog being shooed away and then a greeting:

'How are you, Uncle?'

'Hello, eh?' He was surprised when the owner of the voice emerged from the bushes and turned out to be a tall, heavyset white man, with several large and small cases hanging from his shoulders, his broad smile evoking a grin from Khong.

'What are you doing there, Sir?' he asked when he recovered himself.

Instead of answering, the man pointed to the line of small trees ahead of them but seeing the old man perplexed, added, by way of explanation, 'Birds.'

'Ah, you've come bird-shooting,' whispered Khong spying a pair of bulbuls hopping along a branch. The white man shook his head negatively, his peasant's hat gyrating on his head.

'Not at all,' he replied, peering through his binoculars. 'I came to do research on birds.'

Khong told Somrit to shut up and the foreigner handed the fields glasses to Khong so he could take a look.

From then on, Khong so enjoyed going with his new white friend he almost forgot his landlord's assignment. The foreigner's manner was engaging and his outsize body comical. When hunched over, his rump high, he bobbed along among the trees after a bird call, it was not easy for Khong to smother a guffaw, and then, too, his bird-lover would bring him new and tasty snacks of

which the soda pop was especially appealing. But the strongest reason for his affinity for the foreigner was the latter's show of affection for his dog Somrit. When his bird watching was over, he would call Somrit over, rub his back and give him a big biscuit. The triple friendship grew daily. The old man of Bang Jark Canal sometimes invited his new friend to visit his hut but there always seemed to be some obstacle.

Later afternoon one day after the passage of almost a week, the white man told him that the birds they had been observing with fascination had laid some eggs and he would be back in five days or so to see them, but in the meantime he would ask Khong to keep the local boys from disturbing them which Khong willingly agreed to. Finally, he asked about Somrit who did not accompany them that day. Khong replied that Somrit was sick from the previous day, having so overstuffed himself with food he couldn't get up. At this, the foreigner opened his eyes wide and questioned, 'What's wrong with him?'

'Overeating. His belly's so full, he can't get on his feet.'

Reflecting for a moment, the white man asked, 'Can I visit him?'

'Please do.' The foreigner smiled at Khong's eagerness.

Khong guided his important guest along the path beside the narrow waterway to his hut and called out to his wife, 'Khem, Khem dear, the foreigner has come to visit us.'

The old man called again and again but there was no answer except for the initial howling of the dogs which he stopped with a sharp word. His composure lost, he mumbled apologetically, 'Not in.'

'Who's not in?'

'My wife. Her name is Khem.'

The white man laughed. 'That's all right. I came to visit Somrit.'

'Where's Somrit gone, Khong?'

'It's you, is it, Mr. Yawt?' Khong peered at his friend, the school-teacher, sitting under the canopy of the small boat.

'He was sick so the foreigner took him to the city for treatment. Where are you going in that boat?'

'I'm just getting a ride to school.'

Every morning Khong would sit comfortably at the bank of the canal under the bamboos in front of his house and in the afternoon would walk along the bank turning into the path along the ditch towards the line of small trees where he would busy himself until evening watching the antics of his pair of birds hopping and flying about the trees now festooned with yellow flowers. It became quite pleasant. Sometimes he would try to imitate the bird calls and would catch himself chirping and peeping even after the birds had disappeared into the shrubs. They have just a few words, he reflected, and manage to get on together whereas men have thousands of words but still can't hit it off.

On returning after dark one day, he replied to his wife's inquiry after Somrit, 'Not yet. The foreigner hasn't brought him back yet but the birds are

still there singing in the evening.'

Khem would smile and shake her head at Khong's comments which would usually include the white man and the birds.

'What about Somrit? You said the foreigner would bring him back in five or six days.'

'Take it easy. Tomorrow or the day after. How do we know how sick he was? The foreigner said he had to be taken to a doctor. What a lucky dog he is.' Khong said emphatically.

The following day, the foreigner did come but without Somrit. He said that he had sent him to a training school.

Astonished, Khong could only exclaim, 'What? A dog school!'

'That's right,' the foreigner said.

'What in the world do they teach them to be?'

'They teach them to be as clever as people,' the white man continued when he saw Khong appear uneasy.

'They'll teach him to know his duties, to guard the house, carry things for his master, catch thieves, and also to be clean and not to make messes.' The explanation was lengthy.

'Can they do that?'

'Absolutely,' the foreigner asserted.

That evening, the villagers travelling along the canal in front of the hut heard the voice of the old man chatting interrupted by the sound of thin laughter from his wife. Thinking it over, Khong decided he had come upon one of the wonders of the world.

'Listen dear, city dogs can do anything. That's why they're so expensive; they cost even more than a full-grown working buffalo. If it weren't our white gentleman who said so, I wouldn't believe it.'

Finally the day awaited by both husband and wife came but Khong was badly disappointed to see Somrit whining in the boat refusing to get out. When at last they got him onto the bank, he snarled at the old man and struggled to get back into the boat. Embarrassed, the white man threw a biscuit to the dog and pushed off leaving him whimpering on the bank. Khong and Khem exchanged glances.

'Looks like he's forgotten the taste of rice gravy . . .' the woman spoke first.

'It looks that way,' the old man said regretfully looking at the dog biscuit with misgiving.

After he had gulped down his special food, Somrit leaped at one of the hens, snapping at it around the house and when it finally escaped by flying onto the roof, Somrit turned on one of his old friends who was wagging its tail to welcome him back, seized him by the throat and flung him around. Unable to stand it any more, the old lady seized a paddle and slapped it sharply down in the middle of Somrit's back. Somrit, squealing, slunk off under the house.

'Look at that. You eat a few fancy meals and think you're a big foreigner. I'll break you back with the paddle in a minute,' she threatened the dog again.

'Lay off him, Khem. He's just back from good food and good times over there, let him show off a little. When the smell of

the white man wears off, he'll be himself again.'

'Foreigners, bah! The old lady leaned the paddle against the house post. 'You just watch. He's not yet finished with this foreigner business. Here we were counting the days to his return and when he sees us he growls in our face.'

'Well, if he knew what was right, he'd be a man not a dog,' the old man continued to take the dog's part and his wife walked away petulantly.

The following morning Somrit was no better. He was moping, refused to eat, gave a nasty look at anyone who came near, snarled and growled. At noon, the teacher, Yawt, paddled upto the front of the house and called out, 'Has Somrit come back? I thought I heard him bark.'

'It's awful, Yawt,' the old man complained as he walked out to the landing.

'Since he came back from the city, he's refused to eat rice, behaves so proud and goes after the other dogs.'

'But you said he'd been sent to a training school.'

'Yeah, I don't know what they taught him. He's been ruined.'

The teacher mulled over the problem and advised, 'Maybe he just feels a little strange in these surroundings or he's learned new habits. I hear at these dog schools they train dogs to love cleanliness, to relieve themselves in the proper places and not to accept food from strangers so as to avoid poisoning.' The teacher expatiated in the manner of people who feel they know a great deal. Finally, he asked Khong, 'What did you put his rice in?'

'A coconut shell.'

'That will never do.' The teacher was quite positive. 'You can't treat him in the old way any more. Try putting it on a plate.'

The old man disappeared complaisantly into the kitchen and emerge a moment later with an enamelled dish full of rice mixed with fish.

'Somrit, here, Somrit.'

The dog emerged from under the house, sniffed at the plate put down in front of him and proceeded to lap up the contents.

'What did I tell you?' the teacher remarked smugly. 'These trained dogs are very particular about cleanliness.'

Somrit, finished eating, turned to bark at Khong.

'Now, what's bothering him?' the man asked.

Yawt thought for a moment then instructed Khong, 'Ah I know, put on your best clothes.'

'What?'

'Don't be stubborn. Play along with him.'

Khong went inside to change into a new pair of black pyjama-trousers, a faded blue shirt, wound a red cloth around his waist like a sash and put on a palm leaf farmer's hat.

'How's that?' he asked as he appeared from under the roof.

The teacher pointed to the hat and motioned him to remove it.

'It makes you look too much like a peasant.'

The man obeyed and strutted into the centre of the yard, standing there elegantly.

'Somrit!' He snapped his fin-

gers to call the dog over. The dog wagged his tail a little but in a moment started to bark again.

'Damn!'

'Not fine enough, Khong.'

Khong cocked his head to one side and murmured, 'Just like a teacher to know everything.' Then he spoke to the dog, 'I know what you're after, my Somrit. To please you I'd like to put your food on a golden plate. But what to do? As for my clothes, these are the only good ones I have.'

Before he finished, Somrit raced to the boat landing whimpering happily. When Khong and the teacher, squinting against the sun, recognized the landlord, Khong followed and raising his hands, in respectful greeting said, 'You've come early to day, Sir.'

'How are you? Everything all right?'

'Yes, Sir'

'Well, I see Somrit has grown a lot.'

But when he noticed the young dog making a fuss on the bank, he changed the subject.

Khong sighed deeply when he saw two foreigners sitting in the boat also eyeing Somrit.

'Hello doggie,' one of them called out.

Somrit increased his whining.

Except to tell the boatman to move on, the landlord said nothing more. When the boat was gone, Khong walked over to Somrit.

'Henlo, Henlo,' he said trying to imitate the greeting of the foreigner. He bent down to hug the dog but the instant he stroked the dog's back, Somrit snapped his teeth into Khong's shoulder.

Khong grabbed a stick and brought it down hard on Somrit's head. The dog had scurried under the house, crying, before he could strike again.

'Bite your own father, will you?' His voice trembled with anger.

The commotion brought Khem and Yawt hurrying over. When Khong pointed to the wound in his shoulder, they looked at each other and were stunned but the teacher, as usual, recovered quickly.

'He was just doing what he thought would please his trainers.'

'What should I do with the animal?' Khong wondered as he walked into the hut.

'Why ask! It's your dog, Uncle. You brought him up. You can do what you like with him.'

The teacher got back into the boat.

The old man went into the house, set a pillow against one of the posts and settled down against it, closing his eyes, his mind wandering off into the paddy fields. A furious barking roused him. About ten people were standing in front of the hut.

'Khong, I've agreed to sell this land to these people. They're going to put up a factory. It's all right for you to stay on. You needn't move until they begin to build.'

Khong assented respectfully. His eyes swept around his house, and he thought of the factory, the chimneys. His shoulder throbbed. He thought of the teacher's words, 'You brought him up.'

LIONS OF THE PUNJAB

By Amrik Singh

Book Review: Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, University of California Press, PP xvii = 259, 1 29.95, Indian edition Archives Publishers, 1987, Rs. 200/-

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, and Mahaprabhu Chaitanya, the most outstanding figure in the Vaishnavite movement, were contemporaries. It is believed by some people that they even had a meeting with each other on one occasion at Puri. Whether correct or otherwise, both of them belonged to what may be described as the mainstream of the Bhakti movement which had filled the Indian society with a certain kind of ferment for a number of preceding centuries.

How is it that the Vaishnavite movement remained a movement of piety and adoration of the Lord while Sikhism drawing its inspiration from the same source eventually went on to be militant. There can be only two explanations for it. One, the different social and political situations in Punjab and Maharashtra coupled with the different social formation and outlook of the people in these two widely separated areas.

The book takes off from the middle of the 19th century after the annexation of the Punjab by the British and comes up to 1925, and investigates the religious and cultural ferment as also the social and economic changes that took place in the Punjab during this crucial formative period.

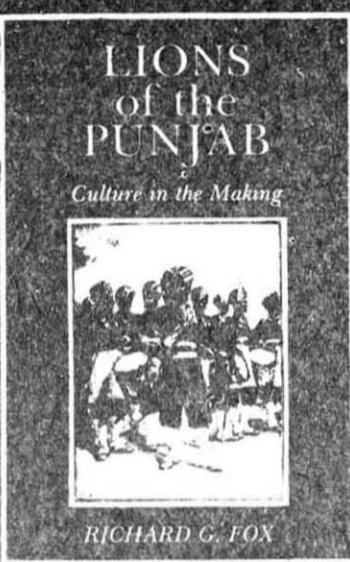
This period conditioned the Sikh mind in such a fundamental way that so much of what is happening today can be traced back to what happened during the Gurudwara Reform Movement of 1920-25. Richard Fox offers a rigorous analysis of the Singh Sabha movement, the Arya Samaj Movement, the patronage extended by the British to the Sikhs in recruiting them into the army in large numbers and in situating them in the pristine tradition of Sikhism, the conflict between the pro-British and the anti-British attitudes and the final act of defiance in 1925.

It would be unfair to the author however to describe this book only as a book about the Punjab. The sub-title of the book is equally important. It is called *Culture in the Making*. To use the author's own words,

The puzzle, then, is how two similar ideological religious identities can come to differ radically in motivating collective political behaviour. In the context of late nineteenth-century Punjab, the question becomes why did a reformist Sikhism, the Singh Sabha Movement, and the new version of Singh identity it promulgated, develop into an anticolonial peasant up-

rising; whereas the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement and the new, embracing Hindu identity it put forward, was generally unsuccessful among the cultivators.

The answer to this puzzle according to Richard Fox, lies "in the peculiar historical conjunction of material conditions and cultural meanings that constituted the political economy of the Punjab, into the first decades of the 20th century". The rest of the book is by and large an elaboration of this hypothesis. The kind of evidence that he has unearthed



from various sources is amazing in range and diversity.

Jats and Sikhs

Consistent with his overall approach, Fox attaches considerable importance to the fact that the jats who constituted the most positive element in Punjab economy were Sikhs by and large. As he puts it,

Are the Punjab Singhs equivalent to the united Kingdom Celts? Did the most economically distressed rural area, the central Punjab, happen to have high concentrations of the Sikh cultivators? Was it therefore only "natural" — a mechanical outcome of material conditions —that the Singh identity incorporated their protest?

Going much beyond hypothesis, Fox points out that the census figures from 1881-1931 provide a clue to what was happening. In 1881, the percentage of Hindu jats was 37.81 and that of Sikh jats 53.36. In a period of 50 years, the percentage of Hindu jats came down to 9.37 and that of Sikh jats went up to 79.35. Clearly, a large number of Sikhs jats chose to declare themselves Sikhs and identify themselves with whatever was happening in and to the Sikh community at that time. All kinds of things were happening, including the fact that after World War I there was recession in the prices of agricultural products. The Arya

Samaj Movement which was the other strong reformist movement at that time had, according to Fox, "never transcended its origins in the Punjab urban lower middle class".

In 1911, for instance, only 14 per cent of them came from among the jats and the rajputs and the rest belonged to the three merchant castes of khatri, aroras, and banias. His discussion of the ethnic make up of the population and the appeal of the two respective reform movements to different segments of the population is illuminating. Several other scholars have written on this theme but none with such grasp of detail.

Biological Determinism

The second new point which Fox makes out is the rise and spread of what he calls biological determinism in Victorian England. According to it, certain races were superior to others. In terms of it, the British came to develop the hypothesis of martial races and non-martial races. The Sikhs and the Punjabi Muslims, more than any other community in northern India, met the requirements of martial races. That is why the British chose to induct them into the army in such large numbers. According to his calculation, the Sikh strength in the army was 20 times higher than their population in the country.

A related factor was the southward movement of Russia towards Iran and Afghanistan. As students of late 19th century Indian history know, the Russian danger loomed much larger in the eyes of British imperialism than perhaps was justifiable. But whether justifiable or not, the fact remains that his shaped their thinking to a great extent.

Quite some people are aware of this particular dimension of British imperial policy at that time but the impact of British thinking about the importance of heredity and the role of human taxonomy as imported from nineteenth century Europe have neither been referred to by other scholars in any significant way nor given the same importance as Fox does.

Altogether, this book is an important contribution for anyone who wishes to understand Punjab. That this is an important book is underlined by the fact that it was reviewed for three days running in the Times of India in October, 1986. Either the reviewer, Ram Swarup, did not understand the basic thrust of the book or, more likely, he chose to misrepresent and distort it. This is not the occasion to take issue with that particular reviewer but it may not be inappropriate to speculate what would be the reactions of the author to find himself so changed out of recognition. •

Human Rights Tribunal GIVING SHAPE TO AN IDEA

It was on 23rd March, 1986, in Hyderabad that some civil liberties activists first discussed the idea of setting up of a people's tribunal to investigate into and adjudicate on cases of state violence. The need for such a tribunal was felt in the context of increasing state violence in several parts of the country, specially Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and the North-East. It was decided to discuss the idea with a wider group and so a meeting was called on 27th April, 1986 at New Delhi. At this meeting, which was attended by activists of the civil liberties and democratic rights movement from different parts of the country, it was decided that the tribunal should consist of retired judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts.

Between April and August retired judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts were contacted and the result was that nine judges readily to constitute the tribunal.

On 3rd August, 1986 activists of civil liberties and democratic rights groups met in Bombay to discuss how the idea was to be given a concrete shape and form. It was decided that the tribunal would be called the Indian People's Human Rights Tribunal and it would be set up by concerned citizens who will form themselves into the Indian People's Human Rights Commission.

A small group of activist lawyers was asked to draft a Declaration and a Constitution for the Indian People's Human Rights Commission. The group met at Ahmedabad on September 15th and 16th, 1986 and prepared the drafts.

The drafts were circulated among concerned citizens and finally adopted on 19th October, 1986 at Nagpur.

At Nagpur a secretariat consisting of eight persons was elected. They are: P.A. Sebastian (Principal Secretary), Bombay, K. Balagopal, Hyderabad, R.P. Shukla, Ahmedabad, Pankaj Dutt, Nagpur, Dalip Singh, Bombay, Nandita Haksar, New Delhi, Sujato Bhadra, Calcutta, and Virendra (Treasurer), Bombay.

Arwal Firing: A Case For Investigation

The first sitting of the Indian People's Human Rights Tribunal will investigate into the legality of the police firing on 19th April 1986 at Arwal, a small town in Jehanabad District of Bihar in which a large number of people, including small children, were killed. The meeting upon which the police fired was being held under the leadership of the Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti, an organisation of landless labourers and poor peasants. The President of the MKSS has sent us a written complaint. Here is an extract:

"In fact it is a barbed wire fence which separates the police

station from the Pushtakalya. At about 3 p.m. seven to eight hundred people reached the place which is surrounded at three sides by boundary walls. The meeting was organised by the MKSS. There was a large number of women and children in the meeting. There was a band party which had come from the nearby village to attend the meeting. As the members of the band party were followers of the MKSS, they had come with their band to participate in the meeting. The meeting was totally peaceful. After the meeting had gone on for about an hour, a large number of policemen consisting mainly of Bihar military force regiment no. 1 which consists of Gurkhas, led by C.R. Kaswan, the newly-appointed S.P. of Jehanabad encircled the meeting. The only exit was sealed by the police vehicles. Without exchanging a single word with the people or the organisers of the meeting, without even telling the people to disperse, or that the meeting was illegal, the SP shouted 'fire' and the police started firing indiscriminately with their rifles.

The firing which was premeditated, unprovoked and uncontrolled, resulted in a large number of casualties. Later on, as a cover up, the police made up the case that an armed crowd of MKSS extremists attacked the police station and the police had to resort to firing in self-defence.

Our preliminary investigation revealed that four independent enquiries into the incident, including one by Mr. Rajinder Sachar, former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, have found that the firing was unjustified and illegal. The Bihar Government, has however, chosen not to order either a magisterial or a judicial enquiry into the firing. Even the investigation carried out by senior official of the Revenue Department has been kept secret.

Mr. P.S. Poti, Mr. T.U. Mehta and Mr. Sharma Sarkar will hear the case at the first sitting of the Tribunal. The dates will be announced soon. •

Chakmas Struggle for ...

Continued from page 16 col 5

drive a wedge into tribal unity. However, this intention has been belied as the tribals have worked out agreements on movement in each others territories. These agreements and efforts by the Tripura Youth Volunteer Army are definite moves towards pan-tribalism — a unity of hill people in disregard of national boundaries. And as any perceived as threats to the officially supported colonisation processes, legitimate political opposition is viewed as disruptive and dealt with by the use of the state forces. This approach has defined most post-1947 policy in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh towards demands for greater autonomy, particularly by tribals.

Growing Concern

The growing concern among the international human rights community was evidenced by several reports in the 1980s culminating two months ago in a powerfully documented report of Amnesty International. This report cites detailed eye-witness accounts of "unlawful torture and killings" of tribal villagers. Also cited are accounts of widespread arbitrary arrests of those suspected of supporting the Shanti Bahini. Amnesty cites cases of prisoners held at army and paramilitary camps being kept in pits where boiling water is regularly sprinkled over the detainees. Electric shocks, burning with cigarettes and hanging the detainee upside down and beating them are other methods of torture adopted. Condemning these atrocities, Amnesty adds that, "although the government has a duty to maintain law and order, the Bangladesh security forces have systematically engaged in practices that have violated fundamental human rights."

Amnesty has reiterated the demand made by itself and other concerned organisations several times: that an independent commission be constituted to investigate these violations. As before, there has been silence from the Bangladeshi government.

Weak Defence

There is one interesting development. In 1983, the renowned British organisation, the

Anti-Slavery Society, placed a detailed report before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. On August 12, 1983, Mr. Alimul Huque, First Secretary in the Bangladesh Mission in Geneva responded before the Commission stating that all that the Bangladeshi government was doing was to "bring the fruits of economic development to the inhabitants of these areas" and that the "Constitution guarantees equal

In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

Article 27, U.N. International Covenant on Civil Political Liberties

access to laws irrespective of the residence or of the tribal affiliation of its citizens". On the question of the growing impoverishment of the hill people, Mr. Huque so innocently states that "such degradation and economic deprivation is shared by 96 million people of Bangladesh". Further, responding to the incidences of growing colonisation of hill peoples' land by Bengalis, Mr. Huque, in true official character says, "Bangladesh is a country with a homogenous people. How can we deny our citizens the right to travel from one part of their country to another?" This defence goes on to even state that, "Peace and communal harmony prevails in all parts of Bangladesh, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts."

Within the growing breakdown of communication between the Bangladesh government and the increasingly cornered hill people, and the continuing climate of using State might to overpower assertions for greater autonomy, it is imperative that further encroachments halted immediately and a political settlement sought which respect the land and forest rights and the cultural identity of the tribals. A halt to the genocide perpetrated on them and their aspiration for greater self-determination must become a reality.

An elderly tribal woman is carried by other villagers to join those hiding in the forests



The Chakmas of Bangla Desh

By Bhagwan Das

During the last few days Chakmas have been very much in the news in national papers. Some 36,000 Chakmas, men, women and children oppressed and terrorised by the Bangla Desh armed forces and Moslem fanatics, migrated to the neighbouring states of Mizoram and Tripura since they believe that their lives, property and honour would

government for not returning the Chakmas according to agreement. On the other hand the Chakmas feel they would be subjected to torture, harassment and perhaps imprisonment and extermination.

Who Are The Chakmas

Bangla Desh has linguistic and ethnic minorities. It has non-Bengali speakers (800,247), Urdu Speakers (310,628), Hindi speakers (140,845) and Assam-Bhutia group languages speakers (136,475). It has Christians, Anglo-asians, Garo tribes, Ismailis and Chinese. Among the major religious groups, it has Hindus and Buddhists. Buddhists are divided into Barua, Chamka, Mogh, Mru, etc. groups. Baruas do not form a group and are found in the South West of Bangla Desh. Moghs and Chakmas are found mostly in Chittagong Hill tracts. The Chakmas who profess Buddhism live in the forest areas. In the 13th century their Buddhist temples, shrines and chaityas in the area were under the crescent by Ikhtiar Khalji. Many of the Buddhists were forcibly converted to Islam and many more followed them for security. But in some hilly areas, people continued to follow Buddhism. Chakmas and Moghs were two such tribes, even though they too could not escape the influence and pressure of Islam.

According to a legend prevalent among the Chakmas their ancestors migrated from Bhagalpur in Bihar and they belong

Genesis Of The Problem

So long as the British ruled India, the Chakmas had no major problem and enjoyed a kind of autonomy. Soon after the partition of the country in 1947 their problems began. The political status of the Chakma kingdom was not clear. It met the same fate as the small landlocked state of Chitra Gilgit. While princely states were given the option to accede to any one of the dominions, the Chakmas working under the delusion that their area also comprised an independent autonomous princely state, the Chittagong Hill Tract declared itself part of India. The Indian flag was hoisted on the 15th August and continued to fly over the Rangamati secretariat for nine days until it was forcibly pulled down by the armed forces of Pakistan.

This was followed by continuous repression by the armed forces and Moslem fanatics who regarded the Chakmas as a potential source of trouble and belligerency.

Pressure On Bangla Desh

Under pressure from the Buddhist countries the government of Bangla Desh changed its attitude for some time but repression with greater vengeance started again. Chakmas were forced to leave their homes and find refuge in India. The Shanti Bahini got split in two groups and one of the groups intensified its insurgency. The State tried all the force at its command to curb the insurgency. Now the 36000 refugees are being sent back because the government of India cannot and does not want to aggravate the situation in Tripura where most of them are housed in refugee camps. On the other hand there is every likelihood of many of them being eliminated on some pretext or the other by the state forces operating in the Chittagong Hill Tract.

The Chakmas have to find a solution within the State of Bangla Desh and at the same time it would be in the interest of Bangla Desh Government to find a political solution to the problem instead of aggravating the situation by resorting to oppressive measures to solve a local ethnic problem. Amnesty International is correct in apprehending the worst in case the refugees go back to Bangla Desh without assurances and guarantees by the Government of Bangla Desh. India has sufficient number of Bangla Deshi, Afghan, Tibetans, and Sri Lanka Tamilian refugees and has no desire to add more from Chittagong Hill Tract.

In the case of Chakmas the international community and especially the Buddhist countries and societies should pressurise the Government of Bangla Desh to adopt a saner policy and also to ensure the safety and security of the Chakmas by earnestly removing the causes which have compelled them to leave their home and hearth to seek refuge in India.

All people have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Article 1, U.N. International Covenant on Civil Political Liberties

pressure groups and the insurgency let loose by tribal people led by Tripura National Volunteers — T.N.V. One of the demands of the T.N.V. is to send back the refugees ... to Bangla Desh.

During the second week of December 1986 the question of sending back the refugees to Bangla Desh was discussed by the then foreign secretary Mr. A. Venkateswaran with his counterpart in Bangla Desh. He was told that authorities in Bangla Desh had been able to identify 24,000 refugees and they would be taken back. The identity of the remaining 12,000 was under consideration. Bangla Desh authorities also gave an assurance that conditions would be created in the Chittagong Hill Tracts which could give confidence to the Chakmas about their security in their homeland. Now it seems there are some hurdles in the implementation of the programme of sending back the refugees. Bangla Desh has accused the Indian

ed to the Mahayani school. After the fall of Buddhism in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, they looked to Burmese and Arakanese Buddhists for guidance and came under the influence Theravada school of Buddhism. In 1855 the Chakma queen Rani Kalindi was baptised by Shri Sangraj Mahasthavir and the Chakma kingdom began to follow Theravada Buddhism.

The Chakmas enjoyed considerable freedom and independence and resisted the forces of East India Company. The British, instead of subjugating the belligerent tribes of the area, entered into a kind of compromise. The area was notified as 'Excluded Area' in 1900 A.D. and a book to regulate the affairs of the area was published under the title "Hill Tract Manual". The Chakmas continued to enjoy peace and prosperity in the area ruled by their own kings. As many as 13 communities reside in the Chittagong Hill Tract.

Chakmas Struggle for Self-Determination

Smitu Kothari

For the residents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, it has been a brutal story of systematic economic and cultural exploitation. The Bangladesh government has not only encouraged Bengali settlers to move in from the plains, it has also given massive military and paramilitary support to facilitate the aggression. Since the early seventies, this forcible expropriation of their rights to land and forests has forced many of the non-Bengali inhabitants (most of whom are *Chakma tribals* and practising Buddhists) of these hill tracts to resort to armed resistance. Many others, unable to hold their own under systematic assaults have migrated further into the hills or to India.

In the last few years, there has been an escalation in the ferocity of the conflict and the ruthlessness of the ruling authorities in Dhaka. There has simultaneously been a more aggressive assertion by the Bengali settlers of their 'right' to colonise.

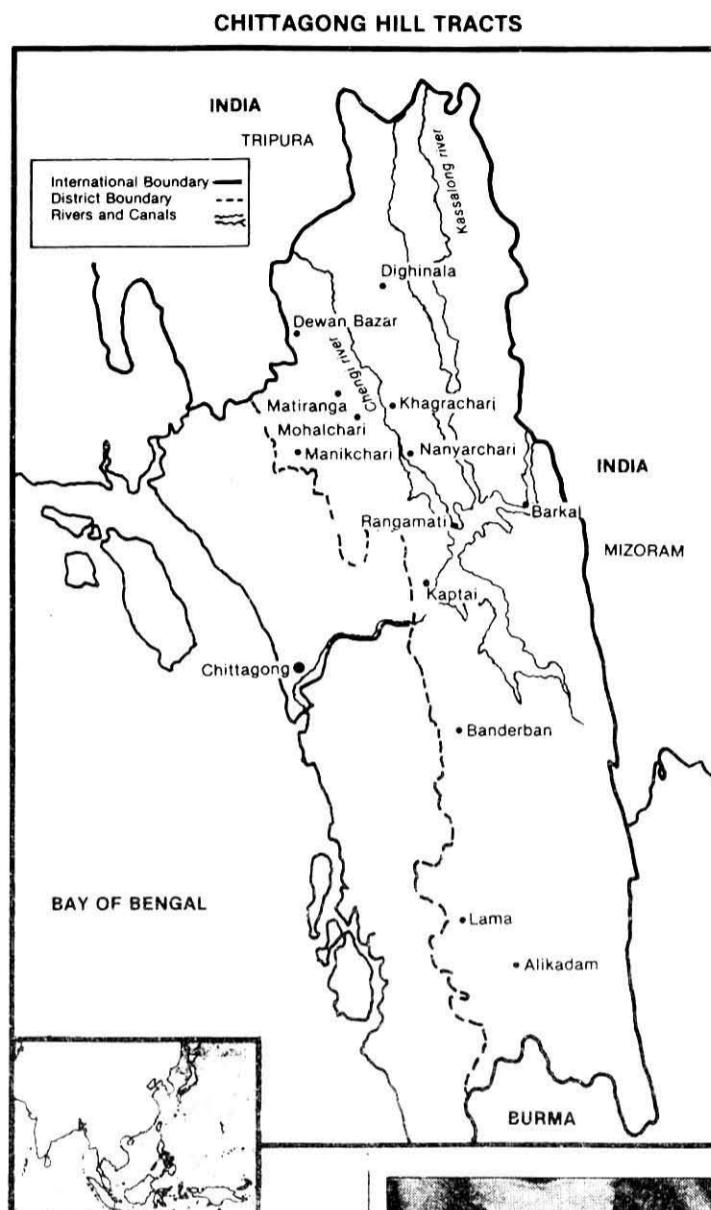
The Chittagong Hill Tracts comprise the largest district in Bangladesh. Covering roughly 10 per cent of the land area, it is also the most sparsely populated part of the country. Until quite recently, the district was populated by 6,00,000 tribespeople who of Sino-Tibetan descent, have historically kept a distance from the majority plains population. They share, in their lifestyle, language, religion and physique a close identification with their natural neighbours in north-east India and in Burma. It is only political boundaries which separate these culturally interlinked peoples.

Influx From Plains

While Bengalis started to migrate in small numbers in the 17th century, it was only in the 1850s that the Chakma Raja, Dharam Bux Khan and later his successor, Rani Kohini brought Bengali cultivators to farm in the lowlands. The British were instrumental in introducing 'settled agriculture' to the tribals of the Chittagong forest. During this period, only tribals owned land and up until independence in 1947, the Bengali population was only 2 per cent.

The acceleration of current conflicts is evident in the fact that in less than 15 years after independence, the 'outsider' population was already 17.7 per cent (1961) and by 1980, this had become almost a third. Estimates today place the Bengali population at above 40 per cent.

The hill people have understandably resisted this massive encroachment. In the 1940s the Peoples Organisation (PO) was formed which sought full autonomy and which opposed incorporation into either Pakistan or India. These demands were never heeded and in fact, in 1948, several leaders of PO were arrested. Ill-conceived development projects were then to further the tension. In fact, one project, the Kaptai dam, dis-



The northern area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts where military and paramilitary forces conducted raids in April and May '86

placed 1,00,000 tribals and submerged 40 per cent of the best agricultural land in the district. Detailed studies have shown that almost none of those displaced received even decent cash compensation. Facing the annihilation of their way of life, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Welfare Association was formed in 1966. Little notice was taken of its demands, and then in 1971, civil war broke out in East Pakistan.

Illusion of Liberation

Ironically, many tribes people worked for independence in the hope that the new state would alleviate the external aggression in their lives. This hope was not to be realised. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's private para-military organisation, the Rakhi Bahini

This led in 1972 to the emergence of the *Parbottya Chittagong Jana Sanghati Samiti* (PCJSS), the Hill Tracts Peoples Solidarity Association. By 1975, the PCJSS had an armed wing—the Shanti Bahini—with a reported strength of 15,000 members.

For the last ten years, the PCJSS, which believes in a 'peace-

armed and trained Shanti Bahini crossed the Feni river frontier from India".

The demands of the Shanti Bahini are remarkably similar to the increasingly vocal assertions of tribespeople across the Indian border. Large scale migration from Nepal, Bangladesh and Bengal has resulted in the hill people los-

Tribal children living in the camp at Karbuk, near Bhagwantilla in India



A tribal boy reported to have been killed when soldiers raided Sarbojaya village, near Panchari, on 22 April 1986

and the Mukti Bahini plundered part of the area and there were even bombing raids on tribal villages.

These fresh atrocities led to greater politicisation and in 1972, **Manobendra Narayan Larma**, a Member of the Provincial Assembly and later a member of Parliament, led a tribal delegation to Sheikh Mujib. Mujib regarded the demand for regional autonomy and for restricting the influx of Bengali settlers as unacceptable and the persecution of the tribals was allowed to grow.

ful resolution through the political process, has initiated numerous dialogues with the government but gradually, with the latter maintaining its bulldozing tactics, the cleavage between the two has grown.

Bangladeshi Allegations

Interestingly, since 1981, the Bangladeshi government has alleged that Shanti Bahini fighters have been trained in India. In one well reported incident in 1982, Peter Nieweward of the *Guardian* wrote that 'that ... recent attacks came when well

ing control over their lands, forests and over trade. Numerous skirmishes and massacres have resulted.'

Dhaka has further fuelled the volatile situation on the Bangladesh—India border by giving shelter to the activists of the Mizo National Front (MNF), perpetuating tribal unrest in Mizoram and Tripura. One motive for this seems to be to precipitate conflict between the MNF and the Shanti Bahini in order to

Continued on page 15 col 1